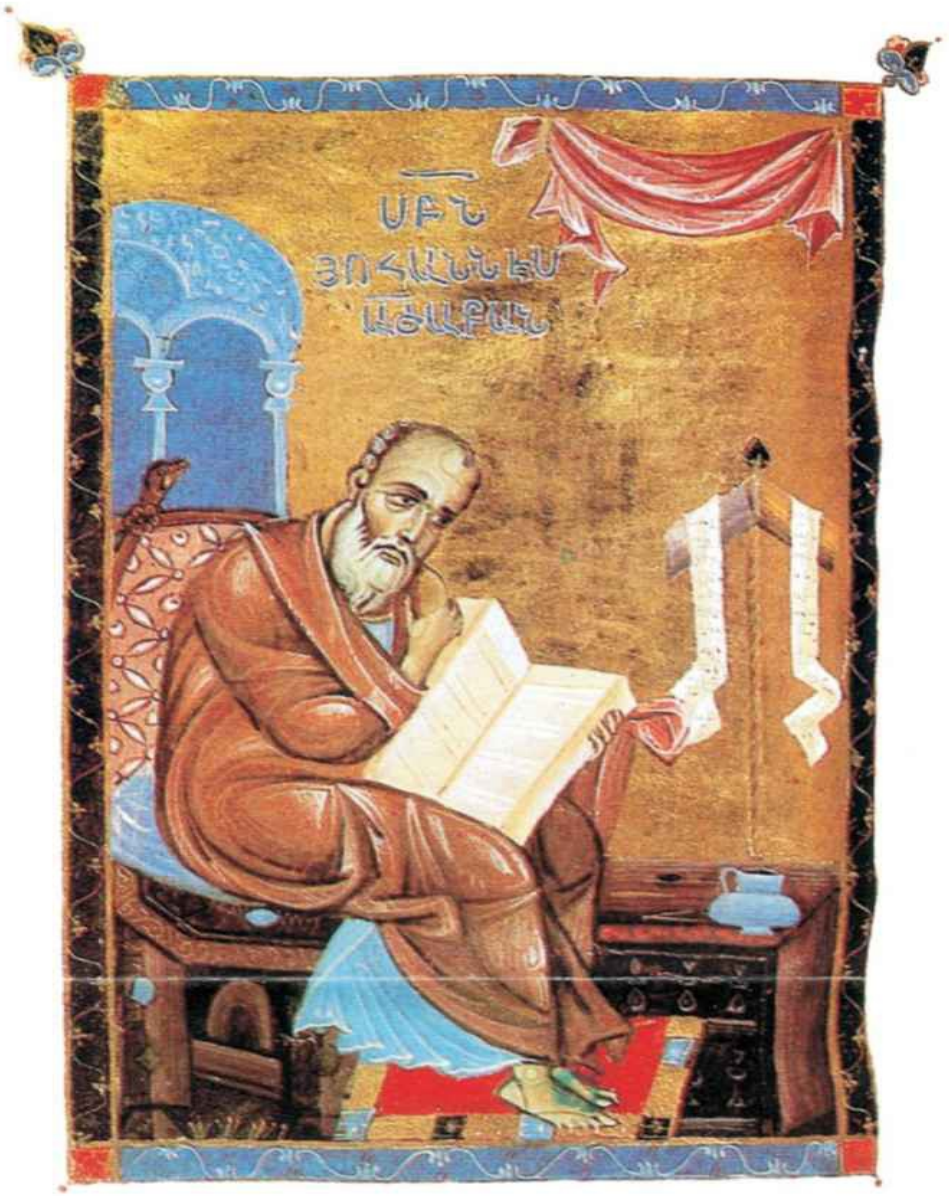
The Christian and Reincarnation



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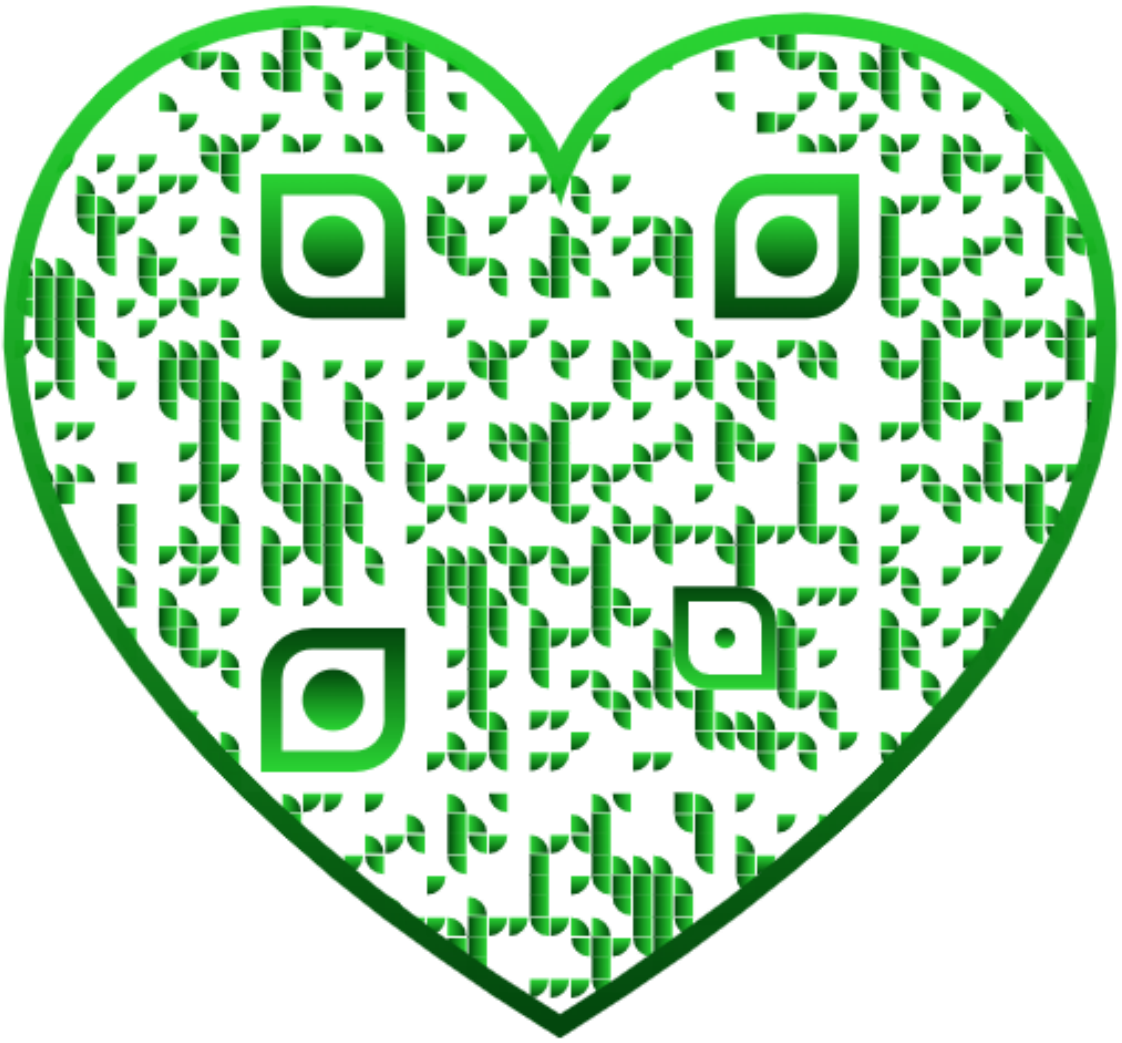

THE CHRISTIAN AND REINCARNATION

STEPHEN M. LAMPE

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Ignorance may deride it
Malice may distort it
But there it is...
(Winston S. Churchill)

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I have sensed the reality and truth of reincarnation for as long as I can remember, certainly from my boarding school days in an Anglican missionary secondary school. I could not, however, articulate the mechanisms governing it. A confluence of fortunate events and deep experiences while I was in my mid-thirties led to my conscious conviction of reincarnation and provided me a clear understanding of how it operates. The cultural environment in which I grew up was also quite hospitable to the idea of reincarnation.

I was, therefore, baffled to learn that some Christian sects make disbelief in reincarnation an article of faith. This triggered my interest in the subject of Christianity and reincarnation. By 1987, when the first edition of this book was published, I was ready to share my knowledge, understanding and conviction on the subject with others, especially with such individuals who believe in God but are intrigued by the meaning of Divine Justice and Divine Love. And I also realized that, in matters such as this, one should address oneself to individuals and not to whole sects or groups. Each individual should make the personal effort to find the truth, especially when it is a matter of spiritual truth. One should personally examine the facts and reflect deeply on them before arriving at one's own conclusion. Spiritual values are gained only through careful weighing and examining by individuals. It is no use simply to accept the views of others or the doctrines of organizations. For this reason, this book is addressed to individual Christians; hence the title "*The Christian and Reincarnation*" and **not** "Christianity and Reincarnation." The times in which we stand do in fact dictate that we take personal responsibility for what we believe or disbelieve.

The Time is Ripe

Change, swift and baffling change, is a characteristic of our times. The change is unpredictable and encompasses all sectors: climate, the economy, the environment, politics, public health as well as science and technology. Even religion, the bastion of conservatism, is witnessing significant changes. Significantly, the “holy grail” of all spiritual knowledge, to which all past spiritual teachings were meant to lead, is now on earth and can be found by all genuine seekers regardless of religion. But, unfortunately, the ideas catching the most attention are generally of a negative character and emanate from fanatics and their actions, from members of irrational sects of major and minor religions, and from others who can only be described as religious entrepreneurs.

With respect to the unusual nature of our times, it has become clear to many people that natural disasters and catastrophic events are truly increasing worldwide. It is true, as some cynics have always argued, that the world has experienced disasters from time immemorial and that any given kind of disaster (except those resulting from relatively new technologies) has probably been recorded at some time and in some place in the past. But there is a quantum difference in our time. Catastrophes, natural and man-made, have increased both in frequency and in intensity. Moreover, there is a much greater convergence of different kinds of disasters. And there is the undeniable phenomenon of global warming, which could give rise to the mother of all catastrophes.

There is renewed interest worldwide in religion and spirituality; spiritual movements and religious sects are mushrooming in many countries of the world. And at the same time, we experience almost daily the evil effects of religious fanaticism and dogmatism and the retrogressive impact of false doctrines and scriptural misinterpretations (deliberate and unwitting). Thus, there are numerous conflicts, suicide bombings, and mindless violence driven by false faith and unrighteous religion.

What do all these changes mean? Where is the world heading? What will happen next?

I am convinced that they are clarion calls for humankind to awaken to new realities, which call for new knowledge, new values, and new orientations in

all human affairs. Something new is, indeed, happening to our world. The very special nature of our times lies in the convergence of some spiritual and physical phenomena. Many religious and spiritual groups indeed speak of an "end time", a Cosmic Turning Point — meaning that we are witnessing the end of one epoch and the birth of a new one. The unfolding spiritual phenomena are discussed in some chapters of this book in so far as they relate to a proper understanding of reincarnation and its implications.

These times call for clarity about the fundamental issues of life and existence. In this connection, I believe that clarity about reincarnation — what it is, how it operates, and how it relates to our Christian (and non-Christian) beliefs — is indispensable as we find ourselves being propelled willy-nilly into a new world. This book provides such knowledge as leads to an intelligible conviction of the truth of reincarnation as one consequence of the mechanisms by which the Creator ensures perfect justice and immeasurable love.

The new world that is gradually unfolding demands a new understanding of the nature of the human being, the meaning of human existence, and the values which must increasingly permeate and dominate our thoughts, words, and our deeds. The correct conception of reincarnation in all its aspects is essential for the development of a new worldview appropriate for the new humanity and the new global order that must result from the fundamental changes that we are witnessing. Above all, each human being must change and adapt himself/herself to the true Will of the Creator. The first step is for each individual to know the true Will of the Creator; reincarnation as explained in this book is a consequence of God's true Will.

It is my prayer that the humble effort represented by this book may lead many to a higher recognition of the true teachings and the real Mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And may the reader be helped to an appreciation of the new revelations given to humanity during this period of the great Cosmic Turning-Point and the World Judgment.

Editions

The first edition of this book appeared in 1987. In 1990, a second edition with minor revisions was published and a third edition followed in 1994. Two

years later, in 1996, a fourth edition appeared. The book has been so well received that each edition had to be reprinted two or more times. The last reprint was in 2002.

This fifth edition includes many significant changes and involves a major restructuring of the chapters. A new chapter has been added and the contents of this edition (excluding the Index) are about 25 percent more. The first and second editions had subject indexes but they could not be provided in the third and fourth. A comprehensive Index is restored in this fifth edition, which I designate as the “Legacy Edition.”

Acknowledgments
I am grateful to the authors and publishers of the books from which quotations have been taken. Many people contributed in various ways to this and earlier editions. In particular, some people reviewed the drafts and made helpful comments and others helped with editing and production. I thank all of them sincerely. But I, alone, take responsibility for the content and any inaccuracies in this and previous editions.

Stephen M. Lampe
April 2008

Chapter 1. Introduction

It is a great promise that repeated lives here on earth are possible, repeated incarnations for the purpose of a more rapid advance and a necessary redemption of the baser reciprocal actions, which is synonymous with the forgiveness of sins! A proof of the immeasurable Love of the Creator Who graciously permits that departed souls, which have wholly or partly frittered away their time on earth and who were therefore still immature when they entered the beyond in order to ascend, are given another opportunity to clothe themselves in a new gross material body or cloak, whereby the flesh they laid aside celebrates a resurrection in the new flesh! The soul that had already passed over thereby celebrates a new resurrection in the flesh. (*"In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message, Volume II, Lecture "The Resurrection of Christ's Physical Body")

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A person is a spirit and the physical body serves as the dress, the clothes, the spirit wears while it is on earth. Just as an earthman changes his clothes but remains the same person, so the human spirit changes its physical body in the process called death. But the spirit, the owner of the body, lives on after discarding the body.

Belief in reincarnation is simply the acceptance of the knowledge that a human spirit, *in one continuous existence*, is given the opportunity to come to the earth more than once. The human spirit takes on a different human body on each occasion. This process is repeated until the human spirit attains that degree of maturity as well as inner purity which ensure that the earth no longer can hold it back from its ascent towards its spiritual home, which is popularly called Paradise.

This simple concept is the key to the unraveling of many mysteries, the

explanation of the inequalities, apparent injustices, and inequities that worry so many well-meaning people. Reincarnation also holds the key to the understanding of some exceedingly important passages in the Bible, which are otherwise problematical. Reincarnation leads us to a conviction of the relative insignificance of ethnicity, race, and nationality; a conviction that is absolutely essential in moving mankind from its present-day chaos into a just and joyful social, political and economic order.

By its very meaning, reincarnation concerns everybody; for, as human spirits, we all reincarnate. Therefore, this book should be of interest to all individuals interested in the truths of life regardless of religion, race, or nationality. But the primary audience is individual Christians. Many Christian denominations believe that reincarnation is an un-Christian idea but there are denominations which embrace it. This book discusses the bases of their positions and examines relevant Bible passages thoroughly. It becomes clear on both Biblical and logical grounds that reincarnation accords fully with the teachings of Jesus. Moreover, reincarnation helps, in a remarkable way, to clarify the Scriptures and also to deepen our appreciation of the great spiritual gems contained in the Bible.

This book is on reincarnation but it includes much more. To understand how reincarnation operates and to appreciate its manifold implications, the reader needs to be introduced to other concepts. Thus, the book discusses the unchanging and unchangeable Divine Laws through which God maintains His Creation that includes our world. There is a Chapter on various aspects of forgiveness in the light of the immutable Divine Laws and in relation to reincarnation. And another Chapter examines what reincarnation implies for the three interrelated issues of nationalism, racism, and ethnically based conflicts.

Reincarnation — the Belief of Billions

To millions of Christians, reincarnation is a familiar word. This is not at all surprising, since reincarnation is the belief of literally billions (thousands of millions) of human beings on earth today. However, an idea is not necessarily true just because billions of people believe it to be so. Consider: there was a time when the whole world believed that the earth was flat. And how wrong everybody was! But, surely, the belief of such a huge number of people of all

races, poor and rich, illiterate and erudite, low and high, oriental and western and belonging to various religions, including some Christian sects, deserve serious study and reflection.

While it is true that billions believe in reincarnation, it cannot be said that the understanding of the concept is uniform. Indeed, reincarnation means different things to different people. Some conceptions or versions of reincarnation are frankly absurd and those who have been exposed to only such versions, understandably, dismiss the whole idea of reincarnation. But that is like throwing away the baby with the bath water. For, there is a conception of reincarnation that is eminently sensible and worthy of investigation by all those who seriously seek the truths of life. This right conception of reincarnation is the subject of Chapter 3.

Apparent Injustices and Inequities

One compelling reason for a serious interest in reincarnation is that, rightly understood, it holds the key to an understanding of the many apparent injustices and the misfortunes that befall people in what appears to be a haphazard, random and inexplicable manner. These circumstances lead many people to ask why, if God exists, and is just and loving, there should be so much misery in the world, so much suffering that appears undeserved, and also many seemingly unearned gifts and opportunities. A common answer is that God's ways are mysterious. But such an answer merely confirms our ignorance; it does not offer any help in our striving for the true recognition of God in His Love and Justice. Unfortunately, many persons have become atheists or are only half-hearted believers because the answers they are provided to this and similar key questions are not convincing. Thinking people need answers that are logical and that are also in tune with their intuitive sensing of an Almighty God whose attributes must include perfect justice and love.

For Christians, a simple, clear, and convincing explanation of the apparent inequities and injustices has today become more important than ever. This is because of the increasing concern for social justice among various Christian congregations. The emergence of liberation theologies and the noble actions of Christian groups and individuals who contributed to the fall of apartheid in South Africa and who strive to dislodge other unjust regimes demonstrate this

new interest, this new mission in contemporary Christianity. Christians who genuinely strive for a just social and political order would necessarily want to be convinced of the justice and love of their own Creator, or else they would slowly slide into atheism.

An objective of this book is to show how the right understanding of reincarnation and its mechanisms lead to an absolute conviction, not mere belief, in the perfect Justice and Love of God. This book is not a theological treatise although it throws light on and clarifies some important theological questions. The work is addressed primarily to the individual Christian and other individuals who genuinely seek to deepen their knowledge about the vitally important idea of reincarnation.

I must emphasize that individuals, not sects, societies, groups, or movements, are the intended audiences. It is unfortunately the case that many people habitually accept ideas and take positions on issues simply on the authority of the leaders and officials of their groups. This happens with people in religious organizations, movements, and cults as well as in political parties and various other types of organizations. Such habits indicate mental and spiritual indolence and should be discouraged. It should be noted that in these matters, each individual takes personal responsibility for what he/she believes or refuses to believe. We are individually accountable for our words, thoughts, and deeds as well as neglect and omissions before our Creator. We must, therefore, personally examine and weigh carefully whatever ideas or arguments are presented to us so that we can come to our personal conclusions.

Our leaders can be, and are sometimes, very wrong. Indeed, ill-motivated religious leaders and those who sense that the views they promote may be wrong usually discourage their members from investigating matters for themselves. Such leaders forbid their followers from listening to or reading different viewpoints for fear that, discovering the truth, their followers might abandon them or begin to question their authority. This is a tactic that the Pharisees and the Sadducees could have used to prevent people from listening to the Lord Jesus and His disciples. And so I invite readers of this book to examine the ideas and arguments presented as objectively as they possibly can so that they can make their own personal assessments.

The lessons of history and events in daily life point to the importance of basing our actions on personal conviction. Think about Nazi Germany and the people who sheepishly obeyed orders to torture and kill millions of Jews and their political opponents. Unfortunately, those who seek power, be it in politics, business, or in religion want followers to accept their own views and authority without question. Thus, the serious Christian must reject situations in which he/she is discouraged from thinking for himself or herself, or dissuaded from basing decisions on personal convictions. In this context, one may remark that spiritual truth comes only to the genuine seeker, one who is willing to examine objectively. It comes only to that person who dares to weigh matters carefully and who does not feel obliged to accept whatever dogmas are offered. “Seek and ye shall find.” A careful weighing with one’s whole being is a vital and necessary part of the process of seeking spiritual knowledge and achieving a deep understanding of the Teachings of Jesus Christ..

Organization and Scope

Following this introductory chapter on the purpose and scope of this work, Chapter 2 provides brief answers to the following questions: What is a human being, where does he/she come from and where does a person go on leaving the earth? It is obviously necessary to have answers to these questions so that we can appreciate what it is that reincarnates, and why it needs to do so.

The proper meaning of reincarnation and the major erroneous conceptions of it are the subject of Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, some categories of believers in reincarnation and the bases of their belief are discussed. These include prominent Christian believers as well as famous people from various walks of life. To put matters in perspective, the chapter also examines the alternatives for a person who does *not* believe in reincarnation and the implications of such contrary views.

The various Christian teachings on the fate of the dead and the implications of these teachings are the subject of Chapter 5. The issues are discussed in a direct and clear manner that most Christians can understand. Theological jargons that confuse (and that may also help to hide ignorance) are avoided. Indeed, I have tried to be simple and direct throughout the book as I seek to

reach ordinary Christians struggling to make sense of the meaning of life and to gain a measure of clarity about life's mysteries.

Many Christians when confronted with the subject of reincarnation readily recall the passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment..." They interpret it as a statement against reincarnation. This passage is discussed in Chapter 6 in its historical context as well as from logical and spiritual perspectives to show that it does not argue against reincarnation. Thus, Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide critically important and essential background for an understanding of reincarnation and the formation of an unbiased and balanced Christian attitude to reincarnation.

I have already indicated that the Bible does contain passages that suggest reincarnation. Such Bible accounts are examined in Chapter 7. The value of reincarnation in clarifying certain puzzling statements in the Bible is demonstrated in Chapter 8. All Bible quotations, except where otherwise indicated, are from the *Revised Standard Version,* a highly respected interfaith translation of the Bible. It is important to state this because some passages do differ substantially from Bible version to Bible version. The Revised Standard Version is one of the few versions of the Bible acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants.

The mechanisms of reincarnation cannot be correctly understood without knowledge of the Divine Laws, the Laws of Creation, which manifest the Will of God throughout Creation. The importance of the knowledge of the Divine Laws cannot be over-emphasized, for they govern absolutely every activity and every phenomenon in Creation. Thus, even if one were not interested in reincarnation, one would still be well-advised to learn and become familiar with the Divine Laws discussed in Chapter 9.

A Law of Creation that features prominently in the process of reincarnation is the Law of Sowing and Reaping (also known by various other expressions). In accordance with this Law, we are irrevocably obliged to reap whatever we sow. For a Christian, this raises the important issue of forgiveness. I have, therefore, devoted Chapter 10 to a consideration of forgiveness in the light of the immutable Divine Laws by which God maintains the whole of Creation.

Even in the minds of those to whom reincarnation makes perfect sense, many questions do arise. Examples of such questions are: Why is it that, except in relatively rare cases, people do not remember their previous earth-lives? How many times must we be reborn? If reincarnation is a fact, why is the population of the earth increasing? These and other questions are answered in Chapter 11.

The social and political problems posed by racial, ethnic, tribal and national differences must be of concern to genuine Christians. Therefore, one expects Christians to seek spiritual clarity on the issues of racism, ethnicity, and nationalism. Reincarnation throws considerable light on many troubling social issues, including these specific ones. They are discussed in Chapter 12 to indicate further how reincarnation clarifies complex issues and helps Christians as well as others to take informed, spiritually uplifting, and morally upright positions on important matters. Chapter 13 considers Christianity in the light of a changing world and new spiritual knowledge, including the knowledge of reincarnation, while Chapter 14 is a list of what I consider the most pertinent references useful for further study.

A Matter of Personal Conviction

People expect discussions of the so-called "unknown" (such as reincarnation) to be tentative, indirect, highly qualified and somewhat complicated. Many readers will, therefore, be struck by the fact that the tone of the discussions in this book is not conjectural, not tentative. On the contrary, it is direct, straightforward, and somewhat authoritative.

There are two simple reasons for this. The first is that, for me, the author, reincarnation is a matter of personal conviction; a fact gained through experiencing. I know that Pele was a superb soccer player, that Michael Jordan (who played Basket Ball as a member of the "Chicago Bulls"), has been one of the greatest Basketball players of all time, that Mohammed Ali was an exciting boxer who rekindled public interest in boxing, and that Tiger Woods is a golf phenomenon. Should I state these facts in uncertain, tentative, iffy terms, just because many people may not know of these sports giants? No. I should not. I know these to be facts.

By the same logic, having been permitted and privileged to know of the truth of reincarnation, I feel fully justified to discuss reincarnation in the manner I have done in this book.

"In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message

As has already been noted, the knowledge of the purpose and meaning of life is necessary for an understanding of reincarnation. Moreover, one also requires knowledge of the Divine Laws to understand the process of reincarnation. I have been particularly fortunate to have come across, and to have recognized the exceptional significance of the truly unique work "*In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message. And I have been seriously studying and reflecting on the work since I first discovered it in the mid-1970s.

The Divine Laws that bear the Will of God are explained in their greatness and simplicity in the Grail Message. The most important questions that move the seriously seeking human being are dealt with clearly and objectively; these include the mystery of birth, the purpose of human existence, the idea of fate and destiny, sex, marriage, death, life here and hereafter, health, the Millennium (the Kingdom of a Thousand Years), the structure of the visible and invisible Creation, the Last Judgment, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Holy Grail and the Grail Castle. The Grail Message explains that the Grail Castle really exists at the summit of the spiritual Creation, far above the Paradise of us human spirits and that it is the focal point and point of transformation of the radiations which come from the Divine Sphere for the benefit of the lower lying parts of Creation. It is only from the height of the Grail Castle that an unbroken, comprehensive overview of the entire working of Creation can be revealed in a message from the Grail; hence, the name "Grail Message."

The Grail Message does not promulgate a new religion, church or sect. In the preface to the work, the author states: "The following Word does not bring a new religion, but is intended as the torch to help all serious listeners or readers find the right path, which leads them to the longed-for height." Cutting across all religious frontiers, the Grail Message guides the individual reader to all the truth of Creation and existence, irrespective of his or her creed, nationality, or race. The Work, "*In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message, comes at a most auspicious time as humankind stands at a crucial

Cosmic Turning Point. It is the only work I know that makes possible a comprehensive understanding of the incredible nature and pace of events in our time.

But the Grail Message does not solicit adherents. Its author Abd-ru-shin (civil name Oskar Ernst Bernhardt) declares:

> I offer to the seekers, but I do not solicit. He who truly seeks *will* find! He will find because it is so willed by God, and helping forces from the Luminous Heights lead every serious seeker to it.

The Grail Message Leads Humanity Back to God and to Jesus

A Christian legitimately might ask: How does the Grail Message relate to the Message and Mission of Jesus, the Son of God? Let me outline the answer right away. The Grail Message is in complete harmony with the undistorted teachings of the Lord Jesus. However, it takes into consideration the fact that the human being of today has so sharpened the intellect, the instrument for thinking that the childlike simple belief which Jesus demanded at that time no longer suffices for him to be able to follow the way ordained by God. Moreover, the Grail Message also presents such essential knowledge that Jesus could not give because His Mission was cut short through His crucifixion by the religious leadership of those days. Those religious leaders murdered Him because they felt that their earthly power and positions were threatened by the Truth contained in the teachings of Jesus.

The Grail Message contains many statements which indicate explicitly its relationship to the teachings of Jesus. The relationship is one of reaffirmation and extension of the true teachings of Jesus. There is much that is utterly new in the Grail Message but which is naturally not opposed to the Message of Jesus because both issue from the Living Truth. The author reminds us that "what is new is not always a negation of what is past but it can also swing in the old..." Since the relationship between the Grail Message and the Message of Jesus should be of special interest to genuine, seriously-seeking Christians, let me quote only two pertinent statements out of many. In one statement the author remarks on the misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus and the need to put back in their proper places the consequently misplaced signposts.

He wrote:

> The Message of the Son of God pointed out the way once before. But in his eagerness to show how clever he was, man *interpreted it wrongly* in many respects and consequently *misplaced* the *signposts*, thereby misleading the human spirit and preventing it from rising!
>
> Now, however, the hour has arrived in which every human spirit *must* decide for itself, whether it is to be "*yes*" or "*no*", day or night, ascent to the Luminous Heights or descent, finally and irrevocably, without any further possibility for it to reconsider! For this reason another Message from the Luminous Castle has now been given. This Message puts the misplaced sign-posts back into their *proper* places, so that the right road may be recognized by all *serious* seekers!
>
> Happy are all those who adjust themselves to this Message with an open mind and a free heart! They will find in it *all* they must know of Creation, and see *all* the rungs, which their spirit must use on its ladder of ascent in order to enter into the Spiritual Realm, Paradise!
>
> Each individual will find in it what *he* needs for his climb towards the Light with the abilities *he* possesses! (*"In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message*, Volume II, paragraphs taken from the Lecture "What Must a Man Do to Enter the Kingdom of God?").

In another passage, the author sums up the purpose of the Grail Message and how it relates to the Message of the Lord Jesus. He notes the ignoble role of the priesthood at the time of Jesus and by implication warns present-day religious leaders not to commit the similar crime of misleading the people in order to protect and extend their own earthly influence with all the material benefits that go with such influence. He wrote:

> With my words I lead to God and also to Jesus! However, in a *more vital* way than has been known in the past, and not as people have trimmed it through their propensity for spiritual comfort!
>
> I point to the fact that God wishes to have spirits in Creation who are

alive and conscious of their *personal* responsibility, *such* as lies in the Primordial Laws of Creation! That everyone must personally and fully account for everything he thinks, speaks and does, and that this could not be effaced for mankind by the murder of the Son of God at that time!

Jesus was murdered because with His demands of a like nature He *too* was felt to be irksome; he appeared dangerous to *those priests* who taught differently, who taught much more leniently so as to attract ever larger congregations in an *earthly* way only, which at the same time was meant to bring about and preserve an increase of their mundane power through mounting earthly *influence.*

This they did not wish to give up! Men did not want to surrender their comfort, nor the priests their influence, their power! The priests did not want to be *teachers* and *helpers* at all, but only rulers!

As true *helpers* they would have had to educate people to become *inwardly independent*, dignified and great spiritually, so that these people would adjust themselves to the Will of God and act joyfully in accordance with it out of free conviction.

The priests did the opposite and *bound* the spirit, so that it would remain tractable for their earthly purposes.

In His Laws of Creation, however, God demands striving towards spiritual perfection from mankind! Constant progress in extending their knowledge of Creation, so that they stand and work in it aright and do not become a hindrance in the swinging, rotating movement!

But whoever does not wish to go *further* now, and tries to insist on *what* he already believes he knows, consequently rejecting or in hostility opposing new revelations from God, will remain behind and be flung out in the World Judgment, because this tears down any obstacle in order at last to let clarity arise again in Creation, the clarity which in future will *further* the progressive development which rests in the Will of God for His Creation.

> Jesus was a new revelation and brought further revelations in His Word. *All this* was new for that time, and as necessary a progress then as it is today; at which point, however, there should not be a final halt!
>
> Jesus shall not be given up as the Son of God through my Message! He must now be recognised *as such* all the more, but not as the servant and slave of a decayed humanity in order to carry their burden of guilt, or to redeem it so that they may have it easier!
>
> And just those who have *really* accepted Jesus as the Son of God *can* do no other than welcome my Message with *joyful gratitude*, and the new revelations from the Grace of God connected with it! Nor will it come hard to them to grasp everything I say aright and make it their own!
>
> Whoever does not or cannot do this has not recognised the Message nor the true Being of the Son of God Jesus, but has built up for himself something only alien and wrong out of *his own* judgment and conceit and... not as the least... out of the laziness of his easy-going spirit, which shuns the movement demanded by God.
>
> The meaning and purpose of the Message from the Light through me in the fulfilment of God's All-Holy Will is the necessary extension of the knowledge for mankind (*"In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message*, Volume III, paragraphs taken from the Lecture "Believers Merely out of Habit").

The Grail Message confirms that reincarnation is a fact and shows that it is a necessary consequence of the Love and Justice of God. The Grail Message explains how the immutable Divine Laws govern the mechanisms of reincarnation. My personal experience of reincarnation and my absolute conviction in the truth of The Grail Message make it possible for me to discuss reincarnation and related issues in an assured manner. Furthermore, as explained in subsequent Chapters, I am convinced that the truth of reincarnation was always implied in the teachings of the Son of God, Jesus

Christ.

The Grail Message and the Truths of Other Religions

I would be unfaithful to the comprehensive and non-sectarian nature of the Grail Message if I fail to stress its absolute consistency with the truths in other world religions. Since individual Christians constitute the primary audience of this book, the focus is necessarily on the Bible and Christian teachings; other religious teachings as they relate to the Grail Message have not been addressed. The author of the Grail Message explains that there is a clear and uniform spiritual guidance from God for humankind in the way all teachings were once given by various prophets and wise men, including Krishna, Zoroaster, Lao Tse, Buddha, and Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him). He wrote:

> If in the course of thousands of years men had not *always* acted as they still do *today*, if they had not time and again distorted everything that was intended to help them in order to adapt it to their own human way of thinking and their earthly desires, there would now be only *one uniform* teaching here on earth, issuing from the Will of God. There would not be so many kinds of denominations.
>
> All the teachings that have come to earth in the past would, *united*, form *a single flight of steps* to the pedestal on which the Truth is to stand, as it has so often been proclaimed to mankind in various promises.
>
> There would be no differences in the interpretations, much less differences in the teachings themselves!
>
> For all teachings were at one time willed by God, precisely adapted to the individual peoples and countries, and formed in complete accord with their actual spiritual maturity and receptivity.
>
> …The bringers of all the individual teachings were Forerunners of the Word of Truth Itself.

Chapter 2. The Human Being: What, Whence, Whither?

For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully.
(I Corinthians 13: 9-12).

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An understanding of reincarnation must begin with the knowledge of certain basic concepts. These concepts are perhaps best discussed by answering some key questions about the human being. For simplicity of expression, the word "man", whenever used will be in a generic sense to mean both man and woman. The use of "man" and the corresponding pronoun is not intended to suggest, in any way, that males are more important than females. Indeed, the equality of the sexes is fully recognized. Furthermore, it is known that, spiritually, the female sex is higher than the male sex because of her superior intuitive capacity.

The key questions are: What is man? Where does man come from? Where does he go when he dies? Why is he on earth? These questions have been asked from time immemorial and the answers, right or wrong, are an important part of the beliefs of all cultures and major religions.

In the long history of man, many ideas have been formulated and many thoughts presented in attempts to answer those questions. But it is true to say that the questions remain baffling to all but a relatively few people. Answers offered are often unclear, difficult to understand, illogical, and unconvincing. Of course, millions of people do not even think about these questions; they are unable to see the relevance to their lives, which consist only of material pursuits with hardly any spiritual content. They consider themselves too busy, or paradoxically, too "enlightened" to worry about such matters.

Others who have, for one reason or another, found the answers unsatisfactory tend to conclude that these questions cannot be answered, that nobody knows. They are right to the extent that their position implies that the right answers cannot be "thought out", can only come through inspiration or revealed through sources much higher than man. However, the truth is that the right answers are now available to humankind. They are simple and logical. And they help to clear various mysteries in man's life and in his relationship to his Creator.

I cannot present these answers in detail here. To do so would require a whole book, and a large book for that matter. I will merely provide sketchy answers, sufficient to facilitate our appreciation of reincarnation in relation to the meaning of life and the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Body, Soul, and Spirit

Let us take the Genesis account of creation as a starting point:

> Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

Two actions are involved here and these have clear implications. First, the passage tells us that there is a part of man that is made from dust; that is, from the material of this earth. This is his physical body. But there is another much more important part — the life-giving component, without which one cannot speak of man. It is what is indicated here as "the breath of life." Incidentally, it is instructive to note the sequence. The body was first formed and it was then given that which makes it "a living being." Without "the breath of life", man is not a living entity; rather, it is merely something that readily turns into dust.

The physical body, being material, is subject to the laws of science, including the law of biological evolution. But we should never forget that scientific laws are not made by scientists. The laws are occurrences that are observed to

repeat themselves everywhere in nature under prescribed circumstances; they are merely the observations, not the creations of scientists. Indeed, all scientific laws if they are valid, are no more than the manifestations of the working of the Will of God in the world of matter. Thus, the "forming of man of the dust from the ground" is what science has now come to recognize as the long process of evolution of the body of man. A process that started from simple organisms through highly developed animals to the complex and sophisticated structure that man is today. One is aware of the creation/evolution controversy. In Chapter 12, I explain that, in a sense, "creation science" and biological science are compatible and complementary. The controversy is largely a case of half education, and we all know that half education can be dangerous.

The creation of man described in Genesis 2:7 (quoted above) is a two-stage event. First, a physical body was prepared, and then an "inhabitant" of the body, which gave the body life, came in. This inhabitant, the "spirit" or "soul", is the real man. The difference between "spirit" and "soul" is clarified below. That man is more than just a physical body is a fact that should be considered a core belief among Christians. The existence of non-physical bodies has ample support in the Scriptures. The Prophet Elijah certainly knew that the soul was distinct from the physical body. Consider the following record of his successful attempt to raise the dead son of the widow of Zarephath:

> Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, *let this child's soul come into him again."* And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah; *and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived* (I Kings 17: 21-22. Italics added).

Similarly, in reporting the death of Rachel, it is stated: "*her soul was departing*" (Genesis 35:18).

Matthew reported Jesus as having taught the disciples that they should not fear “those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28); this implies a distinction between the body and the soul. Peter used the expression “putting off this body” to describe dying (2 Peter 1:14); that is, Peter considered death as a process whereby one discards one body but one continues to exist in another kind of body. Paul says that “there is a physical body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 44). And finally, let us recall Luke’s account of the miracle in which Jesus raised from death the twelve-year old daughter of Jairus. The process was one of recalling the spirit of the girl to repossess its earthly body:

> But taking her by the hand, he called, saying, “Child, arise.” *And her spirit returned* again, and she got up at once (Luke 8: 54-55, Italics added).

Let us right away deepen our knowledge further by clarifying the difference between soul and spirit. The spirit is the innermost core of man; it has several cloaks, coverings or bodies. The outermost covering of the spirit on earth is the physical body. The soul is the spirit still with some coverings but without the physical and the so-called astral body. Thus, man, the breath of life, is a spirit. *It is not that man has spirit, but that man is spirit, and the physical body with all its senses is its tool while it is on earth*. It has other bodies and sense organs that are appropriate for the non-physical parts of Creation in which it is obliged to spend time during its existence.

Shakespeare wrote: “The hood does not make the monk.” We may state, in like manner, that the body does not make the man. We may also recall that when Jesus noticed that his disciples were sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane, He remarked: “The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26: 41). Thus, the distinction between spirit and body is fully supported by Jesus.

More about Spirit

Just as the physical body can be called a native of the earth, so is the spirit a native of the spiritual part of Creation, the spiritual realm or Paradise. It is to this home of the human spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ referred when He

made the promise to the penitent thief on the cross: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Paradise is the origin of man and the place to which he returns on successful completion of his journey through the earth and the regions that lie between.

Because the spirit and all its non-physical cloaks are invisible to our physical eyes, many people ask where these various coverings are. How are they located in relation to the physical body? First, it should be noted that each cloak differs in consistency from the other cloaks. Second, they are pushed into one another rather like the parts of a collapsible telescope or a collapsible radio antenna. They are held, bolted in this position by their radiation; a radiation that acts like the attraction power of magnets. When, for example, the condition of the physical body is such that its radiation becomes weak because of illness, the strength of magnetic attraction is reduced, and if the radiation is weaker than a certain minimum, the body and soul will fall apart — that is, earthly death occurs.

The idea of the human spirit and its various coverings may be likened, in a somewhat crude way, to water and the basic forms it takes. Chemists tell us that water is a compound whose molecule consists of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Water in the form of ice is solid. It can be held, thrown up, and caught; thrown against glass, the glass would break. When the ice is heated, when it absorbs heat radiation, it becomes regular water. It can no longer be held, thrown up, and caught in the hand. Unlike ice, it flows; it can be swallowed readily. Apply more heat to water, and it gradually vaporizes, until it finally becomes invisible. It can no longer be held; its character has changed completely. But in each of the three states, the substance we are dealing with remains the same — two atoms of hydrogen joined to an atom of oxygen.

The rate of vibration of the constituent atoms of water increases as it absorbs increasing amounts of heat radiation. Thus, the fundamental difference among the three states in which water exists is the vibration frequency. As the vibration increases, the substance becomes less tangible and finally, beyond a certain rate, it becomes both intangible and invisible.

Just as at a certain rate of vibration, two atoms of hydrogen joined to an atom

of oxygen make a relatively hard substance called ice and at a faster rate of vibration they form an invisible gas, so it is that the human spirit at a somewhat sluggish rate of vibration has a visible covering known as the physical body. At rates of vibration different from that prevailing in the world of gross matter, the outermost cloak of the human spirit is no longer visible. But the spirit certainly continues to exist, just as water that has vaporized does. It should however, be emphasized that this analogy is only a crude one. The cloaks of the spirit belong to different species, whereas all the various forms of water belong to the same material species.

In Paradise where the rate of vibration is exceedingly fast, the human spirit is "at home" and has dropped all its cloaks. Because of the vastly increased frequency, things happen very fast indeed. So fast that events and experiences that would require one thousand years on earth, can be packed into one day in Paradise. And thus, Peter wrote:

> But, do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

I might mention in passing that the general acceleration of events and the immense changes taking place on earth in recent decades are consistent with a greater influx of spiritual power into the physical world. The increased power is accelerating the development of events in the physical world, making everything less sluggish. The result is that events which would ordinarily have taken decades to develop sometimes happen in months.

The different realms of Creation have different rates of vibration. The spirit has cloaks appropriate to each of the realms through which it must pass, and such cloaks vibrate in tune with the realms. It should be clear that all spirits and creatures at comparable rates of vibration are mutually tangible and can interact directly. It makes no difference whether this same vibrational rate occurs on earth or in the so-called Beyond.

Christians and others might be interested to know that some scientists armed with facts and concepts in quantum physics have studied the idea of an invisible world parallel to our own (what one might perhaps called an ethereal world). They have speculated about the form such world might take.

Conclusions arising from this area of investigation (sometimes called "Survival Physics") include the following: The invisible or ethereal part of the universe occupies the same space as the visible part. The ethereal world is invisible to us because of different "universal" constants such as the speed of light, *c*, and Planck's constant, *h*, while their product, $c \times h$, which determines the elementary charge, is unchanged. The ethereal speed of light is much higher than the speed of light on earth, and Planck's constant is much smaller. This leads to higher frequencies, which makes the ethereal world invisible to us. Gravitational interaction exists between the ethereal world and our world, but this interaction is very small because of the very small masses of ethereal bodies.

The essential point to note is that scientific evidence is accumulating in support of the idea of non-physical worlds in which that which survives the death of the physical body (the soul) might reside.

Many Realms of Existence

In this connection, it must not be assumed that there are only two realms — the physical universe (which includes the earth) and "the Beyond." The so-called Beyond, in fact, consists of many separate realms or divisions. The Apostle Paul spoke of the "third heaven" (II Corinthians 12:2) indicating that he was aware of the existence of at least three heavens.

The Beyond, therefore, cannot be one single realm. This fact throws light on Christ's statement that "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2, Authorized King James Version). Some have wondered how there could be many mansions in one house. We should understand "house" in this context to mean God's Creation, and "mansions" the various segments, planes, realms, or divisions of His Creation. All creatures including human spirits, animal souls, etc, have their places allotted to them according to their different natures. To cover up the apparent paradox of a house with many mansions, the *Revised Standard Version* substitutes "rooms" for mansions. The *Living New Testament* handles the same problem by simply stating: "there are many homes up there where My Father lives."

The Purpose of Existence

We now have the gist of an answer to two of the questions we raised: What is

man, and whence does he come? He is a spirit and his origin is in Paradise. But to appreciate the answer to where he goes at death, we need to have an idea why he needed to leave Paradise, his home. Why did he embark on a journey from a realm of peace, love, and joyful activity to a world that has sadly become characterized by chaos, hatred, vanity, and vile competition?

The reason is that each human spirit on earth started its journey from Paradise as an unconscious spirit germ or spirit seed. As an unconscious spirit seed, it could not participate in the joyful activities of the conscious, mature spirits in Paradise. But it carried with it the potential of becoming self-conscious and mature, and becoming a full member of the community in Paradise. To actualize this potential is the reason for its journey into the world of matter.

This phenomenon is a somewhat familiar one. Take the seed of any crop, that of maize, for example. The maize seed, small and lifeless as it looks, does, in fact, have the potential of becoming a good sized plant, possibly about two meters tall, with many long leaves and looking obviously alive. But to achieve this potential, it must first be given an opportunity to germinate, by being planted into the soil. For the human spirit seed, the world of matter is the soil in which it must be "planted", if it is to develop its potential. The spirit seed (or germ) gradually acquires consciousness, self-consciousness, and maturity in the course of its journey. The successful end of the journey, that is the goal of its development, is a return to Paradise in a conscious, fully mature state.

Whither the Human Being?

Let us now return to the question: "Where does a person go on leaving the earth at physical death?" It follows from what we have stated about the nature of man, that death is no more than a transition. It is the process whereby the spirit leaves or is separated from the physical body, for one reason or the other. The spirit, with its other cloaks, continues its journey in a non-physical world.

We may recall what we said about water whose form changes as a result of changing vibration brought about by addition or withdrawal of heat. Regardless of its form, the essence of water remains unchanged. At death, the outermost form of the spirit changes, but it remains the same spirit,

self-conscious and very much alive.

We have stated that the so-called Beyond consists of many divisions. Where the soul (the spirit without its physical body) finds itself depends on its nature, which reflects the degree of progress that it has made toward achieving its original goals of self-consciousness and maturity.

One Earth-life is Insufficient

It should not be surprising that one earth-life is insufficient to achieve the necessary maturity. That is one reason why reincarnation is necessary. Let us note that some earth-lives are very short indeed, perhaps only a few days or even less. Some have what may be considered long lives, but their experiences are so limited that they cannot be said to have lived a full life. And we should not forget those who are born with severe handicaps.

Can one earth-life really be all there is for each person? It cannot be. If it were, we would have to wonder about the apparent injustices of the system. Some spend only a few days on earth, a few live to be more than 100 years old. Some are born princesses and have all the opportunities in the world; some are born to desperately destitute parents or by debased mothers who literally throw them away. Some are lame, deaf, and dumb and are considered a burden, an unqualified disaster to the family; whereas some are a source of constant joy, pride, and honor to the family. Some are geniuses; some are imbeciles. Consider how many people work long and hard on their musical lessons and yet do not make the limelight. But Johann Hummel, Chopin, and Yehudi Menuhin were all giving public concerts by 11 years of age. Some apparently wicked people are showered with blessings, while the apparently honest and upright experience one adversity after another. Certainly, a thinking Christian who is seeking genuinely should want to know what lies behind all these differences.

Indeed, these inequalities that appear as injustices are major reasons why some people choose not to believe that God exists. Others take the position that if God exists and condones blatant injustices, He cannot be worthy of their worship. Religious leaders who wring their hands and say that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable, that they are beyond our understanding, must accept responsibility for a great deal of atheism in the world, and some of the

blasphemies that people commit. In later Chapters of this book, we show how God dispenses perfect justice and love on earth and throughout His Creation. Without reincarnation, such justice cannot be attained for individual human spirits.

When a human spirit has acquired all the experiences it requires on earth and has at the same time broken all its ties with the earth, it ceases to reincarnate on earth. Its experiencing is then confined to the intervening realms between the physical world and Paradise. The spirit rises automatically toward Paradise as it matures and becomes finer and lighter. On successful completion of its journey, it is a fully self-conscious human spirit. It has graduated from a state of unconscious seed to a mature, self-conscious human spirit capable of co-operating (from its spiritual home) in the continual development of Creation in accordance with the Will of God.

Chapter 3. What Is Reincarnation?

The human spirit must return to the earth a number of times, and incarnate in human bodies, until it has reached the degree of spiritual maturity and the inner purity which brings with it a final turning-away from the sway of the earth, and a continuing ascent into Luminous Heights. (Herbert Vollmann, *A Gate Opens,* p. 379).

And how do we do things in our educational systems? We allow a pupil who has not reached the required standard to re-sit examinations, even to repeat the class... We too are given the opportunity through reincarnation, rebirth, to make up for mistakes which we have made in the Material World, and which therefore have also to be redeemed again here.
(Richard Steinpach, *How is it that We Live after Death and What is the Meaning of Life?* p. 57)

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We have already mentioned reincarnation many times. In doing so, we have assumed that most people know what reincarnation means. Such an assumption is not unreasonable considering that reincarnation is the belief of billions of peoples around the world. While billions know about reincarnation and believe in it, it is true that reincarnation means different things to different people. Before we continue our discussion of various aspects of reincarnation in relation to Christianity, it is necessary for us to make very clear what we mean by reincarnation. In this matter, half education is really dangerous. Indeed, one reason reincarnation is not taken seriously by some people is because of certain conceptions of it that border on the ridiculous.

Reincarnation, of course, means more than one incarnation. *The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* defines incarnation as "the act of assuming flesh or taking a human body and the nature of man." On reflecting on this dictionary definition, one is confronted with the following questions: What assumes flesh? What takes on the nature of man? What takes a human body? The one-word answer is "spirit"; spirit in the sense of the discussion in Chapter 2. Therefore, incarnation is the process whereby the spirit acquires an earthly human body, and reincarnation refers to the fact that the spirit, in its continuous existence, repeats this process more than once. Thus, reincarnation is the idea that a human spirit is given the opportunity to come to the earth more than once; on each occasion, it takes on a *different human body*. That is the meaning of reincarnation used in this book and it is the only one I know to be right and reasonable.

One Continuous Existence

Any number of earth-lives, which a particular human spirit may experience, constitutes one continuous existence; there is no break in the spirit's existence. Between consecutive earth-lives, the spirit is very much alive in other realms in the Beyond. The fact of continuous existence of the spirit is central to an understanding of reincarnation. It is an important point to note because some Christians ask which earth-life will be considered during the Judgment if a man has gone through many earth-lives, as reincarnation implies. Indeed, on the basis of a closely related issue, St. Epiphanius of Salamis (315 - 403 A.D.) argued against reincarnation, which was being taught by the followers of Origen. St. Epiphanius, one of the earliest and most vociferous opponents of Origen, wrote: "First of all if, as the Origenists say, another body succeeds this one, then the judgment of God is not just, for he will either be condemning the new body for the sins of the former one, or he will be ushering it into its glorious and heavenly inheritance in recognition of the fastings, vigils, and persecution suffered for the name of God by an earlier body" (see Epiphanius, Ancoratus 87).

The question raised by St. Epiphanius reflects not only a misconception of reincarnation but also a misunderstanding of the nature and process of the Last Judgment as well as a poor understanding of the spiritual nature of the human being. It is surprising that St. Epiphanius, a prominent Early Church Father, an influential bishop and a monk reputed for his ecclesiastical

learning and nicknamed the “Oracle of Palestine”, had such a wrong conception of reincarnation and of the Last Judgment. But historians have noted his excessive zeal and quickness to suspect heresy, reproaching monks and bishops of his time of accepting what he considered were the errors of Origen. Thus, he had conflicts with John of Jerusalem (356-417) the theologian and bishop as well as with Patriarch St. John Chrysostom (347-407) a highly prominent ecclesiastical writer, described as the greatest preacher ever heard in a Christian pulpit.

Let it be stated that it is the human spirit that is judged, not particular physical bodies. To judge a physical body would be like judging a man’s clothes in place of the man! And the spirit is judged according to how it stands *at the point of the Judgment* — not how it stood in the past, nor how it intends to stand in the future. This means that a human spirit (which has been in continuous existence albeit in different bodies) will be judged in the particular physical or soul body in which it happens to be at the point of the Last Judgment. If a spirit has fully matured and swings in the Will of the Almighty, it gains eternal life; it gains entry into Paradise. But to arrive at this level of maturity, it would have recognized and overcome any weaknesses it ever had and atoned for all sins. Any sins or weaknesses of earlier earth-lives, would, at that point, no longer be relevant because they would have been “blotted” out.

If I stain my shirt, I have a choice of ignoring the stain or of removing it. Once I have successfully and completely removed the stain and kept the shirt clean, it is no different from a shirt that was never stained. An observer can clearly tell whether or not my shirt still carries a stain. If my shirt is without stain, a rational observer cannot be expected to concern himself with whether or not the shirt was ever stained. But neither will such an observer declare me clean, if while still carrying a stain, I let him know that I plan to remove it. So are we human beings in relation to the Last Judgment. This point is in harmony with what the Prophet Ezekiel taught concerning the Justice of God:

> But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the

> righteousness which he has done he shall live... But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, he shall die (Ezekiel, 18: 21-24).

Let us also stress that the idea we are discussing here is fully supported by Jesus. Parables are said to be earthly stories with heavenly meanings, and they were used a lot by Christ to bring His Message home to us. On one occasion, He compared the Kingdom of Heaven to the manner in which the owner of a vineyard compensated persons he recruited to work for him. The vineyard owner employed them at different times of the day; some early in the morning, then new sets of laborers in the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hour. At the end of the day, at the twelfth hour, they were all paid the same amount; an amount equal to the full entitlement of the laborers that were first hired early in the morning.

Thus, how long the laborers had worked in the vineyard was not the issue. The important consideration was that they were at work, and presumably working meritoriously at the end of the day, at the time of compensation. This is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And so it must be explained that the reward for meritorious service, in the sense willed by God, is eternal life. Eternal life in the spiritual realm (Paradise) is the only compensation possible; nothing less or more is possible. Hence all the laborers in the vineyard earned the same amount — eternal life. The parable is not intended to suggest, for example, that we pay a full month’s salary to all our employees including those who work for only one week or even one day. No, the story is about admission to the Kingdom of Heaven, about the ultimate fate of each person. When the time for Judgment comes, the current state of each human spirit will be the deciding factor, and not the spirit’s historical record. It is a matter of whether or not the spirit has attained the required level of maturity and purity.

Those who agreed to take up work in the vineyard may be likened to those who, having been told of the Will of the Almighty, accepted this Will and applied themselves fully to doing It. It does not matter when true recognition

comes, when complete change occurs, as long as it comes before the time of final reckoning. And since no one knows when his own time of reckoning will come, we all have to be constantly at our best! The compensation is the same for all who live according to the Will of God (for all who labored in the vineyard) because, spiritually they are all alike: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelations 7:14).

The robes of all those who came out of the great tribulation had become white. It no longer mattered whether or not they ever had “stains”. We should also note that the owner of the vineyard did not go into the streets to dole out money. Each laborer worked for his pay. And the above passage from *Revelation* clearly states that those saved had washed their robes and made them white. *They themselves did the washing; the Lamb did not do it. This means that we must work for our salvation. The Creator has placed in Creation the mechanism for salvation and provides us the knowledge of how we may work for our own salvation and gives requisite strength to those willing to work for it. The knowledge came to us at very great cost, including the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus.*

Live in the Present

I have stated above that it is the present condition of our inner and outer lives that matters, not what we were in the past nor what we hope we might become in the future. It follows from this fact that we would be unwise to rejoice or bask in the knowledge that we are the reincarnation of some important historical figure, a highly religious person, a great president, or a well-known inventor. Nor should we be dejected if we were to find out that we were criminals or worse, in past earth-lives. Indeed, quite often it is vanity (which is a sin) that makes people want to know about their past incarnations. They nurture secret hopes of discovering that they were great and powerful personalities so that they can boast to all who care to hear.

Thus, we should not go in search of our past incarnations. If we really need the knowledge for our spiritual progress, it will be given to us without any special effort. And if we receive such knowledge with a humble desire to do the Will of God, it will become a staff and strong support for us in our present earth-life. It is necessary, highly valuable, and important for us to

know about the fact of repeated earth-lives and the Divine Laws that govern the process. For, without the knowledge of reincarnation, earthly existence is a puzzle, the meaning of life cannot be appreciated fully and truly, and the Justice and Love of God are called into question. But the specific recollections of individual earth-lives are, in general, neither required nor necessarily desirable.

The rays of the Final Judgment may hit us during one of our sojourns here on earth or while we are in one of the realms of the Beyond. Where we are when the Judgment comes does not matter; what matters is the fact that we shall all be judged. And the Judgment will be based on how we stand at that particular time. We should remember that it is the spirit in its entire existence to date that is judged, not merely the activities of a particular earth-life.

At school we take many examinations as we progress from the beginning class to the final class. Eventually, there comes the final examination, the final reckoning. If we fail the final examination, we get no certificate; our early successes do not count. We cannot afford to fail the final examination. And this is even more so in the school of life where one earth-life is no more than perhaps one course in one class. For this reason, the Last Judgment is of overriding importance. But we do not know *when* the rays of the Final Judgment will reach us. This uncertainty of the time of the Judgment, which is closely linked with the coming of the Son of Man, is stated both directly and through several parables in the Scriptures; for example the Parables of the Unfaithful Servant (Matthew, 24:45-51; Luke,12:41-48) and of the Ten Virgins (Matthew, 25:1-13). The message is summed up in the following statement:

> “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

However, the signs we are told to watch out for are all around us. For this reason, we must now exert ourselves to understand aright and do the Will of the Almighty. We must do away with dead and deadening dogmas and wrong concepts. We must replace them with living convictions that do honour to the Creator. We should now, more than ever before, pay close attention to the following words of the Grail Message:

> He who makes no effort to grasp the Word of the Lord aright burdens himself with guilt! [*"In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message, Volume I, p. (5)]

Away with spiritual indolence! It is spiritual indolence when we expect others to determine for us what we are to believe, and when we do not examine closely what we are told or taught to believe. Every person must work on himself personally to attain salvation. No organization, no church, no sect, no spiritual movement, and no authority can do it for us. Our beliefs must become convictions, and convictions come solely "through inflexible weighing and examining;" not by acquiring the faiths of our parents, our forefathers, our husbands, our wives, or of our friends.

Some Incorrect Notions of Reincarnation

We have already remarked that certain conceptions of reincarnation are wrong and misleading. Let us note and correct some of them. Some religious teachings with origins in Asia as well as the teachings of some worldwide mystical schools spread the idea that, under certain conditions, a human spirit in one earth-life may become an animal, a plant or some other object in a subsequent earth-life. This does *no*t, and *canno*t happen.

A human spirit can reincarnate only as a human being, regardless of how he is faring spiritually. Transmigration of souls, in the sense of a human being reincarnating on earth as an animal or plant, is an absolutely wrong concept. Only an animal soul can take on the body of an animal. It is simply a matter of species. We can, in fact, speak of the integrity of species; that is, a human spirit always remains a human spirit and an animal soul always remains an animal soul. But, of course, within the species, development does take place; indeed, the purpose of human existence on earth is spiritual development. The human spirit may fall or rise on the ladder of development; but it always remains a human spirit and can take only a human form on earth.

Plants, rocks, and such other natural objects that cannot move do not have souls or anything that corresponds to the spirit of man. They only form abodes or habitations for other living and mobile entities that are not ordinarily visible to men. But some persons have seen these inhabitants of

trees and rocks. Ignorance of what these entities are and how they relate to human beings has led to their worship by different peoples at different periods in history. The point is that it is not possible for men to incarnate as plants or as rocks, and the same applies to animals.

There is yet another wrong idea about reincarnation. Some people imagine that reincarnation implies that a dead person may reappear and continue living in another place, immediately or soon after death or burial. In other words, they think that it is possible for a dead person somehow to resurrect in another place and that such a person can be recognized physically by those who knew him before.

There are accounts of brief, fleeting encounters with persons shortly after their deaths. Such accounts usually indicate that the dead person appears to relatives or close friends before they are aware of the death. It is only afterwards that they learn that the person was already dead at the time of the meeting. But the encounter with a dead person may also be by people who already know of the death. Readers of the Bible are familiar with the reported appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples and followers, including the encounter on the way to Emmaus. In all such cases, it is the finer body of the dead person that is seen with the corresponding finer eyes of the living person involved in the encounter. Since even in such situations the finer eyes of the living person cannot function for a long period, the seeing or the encounter is usually relatively brief. The phenomenon has nothing to do with reincarnation.

A related error is the assumption that the physical bodies of the same human spirit in different incarnations must *necessarily* bear some resemblance. The fact is that reincarnation cuts across familial, national, and racial lines. Thus, a member of one race in one earth-life may reincarnate as a member of a completely different race in another earth-life. Therefore, reincarnation does not necessarily imply physical similarity. The word “necessarily” is used because physical resemblance is obviously possible if, in a quick turn-around, a human spirit reincarnates into the same family. Moreover, it is also possible for a person to carry over, from one earth-life to another, certain abilities, weaknesses, and habits. Belonging to this group are prodigies; that is, persons, particularly children, who show early signs of genius or exceptional

abilities along certain lines, such as music, art, language, etc.

Summing Up

Let me summarize the main points of this Chapter. A correct understanding of the concept of reincarnation starts with the knowledge that the human being on earth is a spirit. The present physical body is only a tool, although a very important one, for this particular earth-life. It is the spirit that reincarnates. The spirit is permitted repeatedly to come to the earth, to take over a new physical body as it is being formed in the womb, and to live and experience with this body until, for one reason or the other, the spirit and body again part ways. The body returns to “dust”, while the spirit proceeds on its journey and may return to the earth again; the old spirit takes on a young body — rather like a person acquiring new clothes.

All the earth-lives and the periods in-between experienced by a spirit constitute one continuous, unbroken existence. We have all been here before, and have all experienced earthly death before! And we might be here again. When the Last Judgment confronts one, one’s fate depends on what one has become as a result of all one’s experiences on earth and in the Beyond up to that moment. It is the spirit (the real person) that is judged. And it is judged according to how it is at the point of the Judgment, not how it was in the past, or how it plans to be in future. The influence of the past on the present as well as on the future must be left in the hands of the perfect Laws of the Almighty.

Chapter 4. Believers in Reincarnation and the Bases for Belief

As soon as a man tries to form a true picture of the Perfection of God he will find that this will not only serve him as a guide, but will lead to a quicker understanding of all things in Creation. To know full well the Perfection of God and always bear it in mind is the key to the understanding of God's work, of which man himself is a part! ("In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Volume II, Lecture "*I Am the Lord Thy God!*")

$\frac{14}{7}$ $\frac{14}{7}$ $\frac{14}{7}$

Reincarnation is the belief of many millions of peoples around the world. All the major oriental religions profess some form of reincarnation. The native ethnic groups of North and South America take reincarnation for granted. They believe in it absolutely and make it a basis for their traditional practices. Reincarnation is an accepted fact in the traditions of the many ethnic groups of Africa. Indeed, among the Yoruba of West Africa are to be found many personal names indicative of reincarnation.

Even among the general public of Western societies, the proportion of the population that believes in reincarnation is significant and rising. Opinion polls indicate that more than 20 percent of American people and a higher percentage of their teenagers believe that they had lived before and would live again in other incarnations. A greater proportion, from 50 percent to 60 percent, while not necessarily personally convinced, believes that reincarnation is possible and sensible. Many of the American believers in reincarnation are self-styled "born again" Christians.

Many people who either reject reincarnation or do not bother to think seriously about it do so in the mistaken notion that reincarnation is the belief of weak and unsuccessful persons engaging in wishful thinking or daydreaming. *The fact is that for thousands of years and up until the present time, the most advanced thinkers, many highly successful individuals, as well as some of the most powerful persons have been convinced about the truth of*

reincarnation. There is abundant evidence that some of the best minds and the greatest heroes of the western world were ardent believers in reincarnation.

Famous Believers in Reincarnation

I will name some of the eminently successful and powerful persons, in ancient and modern times, who ardently believed in reincarnation. But by doing so, I only seek to debunk the notion that reincarnation is mere wishful thinking and self-delusion on the part of somewhat weak and unsuccessful people and relatively backward ethnic groups. I certainly do not wish to suggest that the spiritual views of famous people are *necessarily* correct. We all know that some people of considerable wealth and worldly achievements may well be spiritually bankrupt, despite what is implied by the teachings of some "prosperity churches."

Pythagoras (582-507 B.C.)[1], the Greek Philosopher and reformer, is regarded as the world's first true mathematician. He founded a school in southern Italy where he taught musical harmony and geometry. Every geometry student has had to learn and to prove the Pythagorean Theorem (the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the lengths of the other two sides). Pythagoras was convinced of the truth of reincarnation. He claimed to have a recollection of two of his earlier earth-lives in which he was called Aethalides and Euphorbus. Plato (427-347 B.C.), the Greek philosopher who founded the most influential school of the ancient world, believed in reincarnation; he taught and wrote about it. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) is remembered as the greatest Roman orator whose mastery of Latin prose is said to be unsurpassed. He believed in reincarnation. In one of the many expressions of his views on reincarnation, he stated: "It is again proof of men knowing most things before birth that, when mere children, they grasp innumerable facts with such speed as to show that they are not then taking them in for the first time, but remembering and recalling them."

Many famous creative artists and writers believe in reincarnation. Richard W. Wagner (1813-1883), the great German musical dramatist, was convinced of the fact of reincarnation. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) considered one of the giants of world literature, and who was also a painter,

statesman, scientist and natural philosopher, believed firmly in reincarnation and discussed it in many letters and poems. John Masefield (1878-1967), the famous English Poet Laureate and recipient of the very prestigious Order of Merit, was convinced of the fact of reincarnation. Illustrative of his belief is the first stanza of his poem entitled *A Creed*:

> I held that when a person dies
> His soul returns again to earth;
> Arrayed in some new flesh-disguise,
> Another mother gives him birth.
> With sturdier limbs and brighter brain
> The old soul takes the roads again.

Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), the German dramatist, poet and literary theorist also believed in reincarnation. In his historical drama titled *Wallenstein*, Schiller is believed to have been referring to incidents in one of his own earlier earth-lives. The U.S. poet, short story writer, and critic Edgar Alan Poe (1809-1849) asserted: "It is mere idleness to say that I had not lived before – that the soul has no previous existence." Henry D. Thoreau (1817-1862), an American naturalist and author, believed firmly in reincarnation and claimed to have had many personal experiences confirming his belief. In his diary entry for July 16, 1851, he wrote: "As far back as I can remember, I have unconsciously referred to the experiences of a previous state of existence." The popular Austrian poet, Peter Rosegger, wrote:

> And though the ego knows only the present and does not remember the past, I still believe that from one life to the next certain causes and effects continue to exist, preserving and determining the individual. And so it could well be that, in a later life, the person feels and must bear the consequences of a previous life. If a being has perfected itself in this life, then it should enter the next life more perfect, if it has demeaned itself, it should enter the next life baser. This belief may be disconcerting to creatures of low mentality, but wonderfully inspiring to those who strive to become better and purer…(Quoted in Daniel Swarovski, *The Time is Ripe,* pp. 128-129).

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), the French Emperor, is a famous name in

history. Although estimates of his place in history differ widely, he was beyond doubt one of the greatest conquerors of all time. He was a strong believer in reincarnation and claimed to have a recollection of one of his earlier incarnations. He often declared that he was Charlemagne (742-814 A.D.). Charlemagne was King of the Franks from 768 to 814 A.D. and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (800-814 A.D.).

General George S. Patton (1885-1945), the tough U.S. Army Officer who led the Third Army's sweep across France and into Germany during World War II, expressed firm belief in reincarnation. So did another World War II hero, the British Air Chief Marshall, Hugh C. T. Dowding (1882-1970). As head of the Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain (1940), Air Chief Marshall Dowding, later Lord Dowding, contributed immensely to the defeat of the German Air Force, which was attempting to gain control of British skies in preparation for a German invasion of England. Lord Dowding stated: "I am personally convinced beyond any shadow of doubt that reincarnation is a fact." Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), United States statesman, diplomat, author, scientist and inventor believed in reincarnation. He likened his body to the cover of an old book and looked forward to a new life in which the contents of the book would appear again in new and better edition, stripped of the errata that disfigured the earlier one.

William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), beginning with the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1887, built what was at one time the world's largest publishing empire comprising 28 major newspapers. He was convinced of the truth of reincarnation. He argued that reincarnation was the explanation of the extraordinary architectural accomplishments of Severino Gutierrez. Gutierrez, a North American Indian, who had no formal training and who drew all his plans with a stick in the sand, designed and constructed the town of San Miguel de Allende, near Monterrey, Mexico. Hearst said that Gutierrez must have acquired the architectural expertise through personal experience in an earlier earth-life.

Henry Ford (1863-1947) developed a gasoline-powered automobile in 1893 and founded the Ford Motor Company in 1903. He mass-produced the Model T, the first generally affordable and widely available automobile. Henry Ford was a strong believer in reincarnation. He said that

he became convinced of reincarnation at the age of 26, and that the discovery of reincarnation had put his mind at ease. In an interview he granted to the *San Francisco Examiner* on August 26, 1928, he said: "Genius is experience. Some seem to think that it is a gift or talent, but it is the fruit of long experience gathered in many lives. Some are older souls than others, and so they know more." He is further quoted as having written:

> What some regard as a special gift or talent is, in my opinion, the fruit of long experience gathered in many lives. I should mention that I believe we shall be born again. You and I, all of us shall be born many times, shall live many lives and store up rich experiences... The apparently intuitive "gift" is in reality hard-won experience (Quoted in Daniel Swarovski's, *The time is ripe* ... p. 127).

To many who deal in or use high-quality optical instruments and crystal glasses, the name Swarovski must ring a bell. The Swarovski group is one of the most important industrial enterprises in Austria. Daniel Swarovski, who died in 1992, was once its overall head; he was a firm believer in reincarnation. He expressed his conviction on the subject in many published essays as well as in speeches to business groups. A leading African businessman, who was at different times, president of the Chambers of Commerce of Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa, Chief Adeyemi Lawson, was absolutely convinced about reincarnation and often stated his conviction in public lectures.

Let me conclude this section with a quotation from that world famous great social reformer and Indian nationalist, Mohandas (Mahatma) K. Gandhi (1869-1948) who was an ardent believer in reincarnation. The quotation is taken from one of his letters to Madeleine Slade, daughter of a distinguished British Admiral who had renounced the privileges and comfortable circumstances of her birth in order to follow him:

> What you say about rebirth is sound. It is nature's kindness that we do not remember past births. Where is the good either of knowing in detail the numberless births we have gone through? Life would be a burden if we carried such a tremendous load of memories. A wise man

> deliberately forgets many things, even as a lawyer forgets the cases and their details as soon as they are disposed of. Yes, "death is but a sleep and a forgetting…" (Cited in Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston, *Reincarnation: an East-West Anthology* …)

The names mentioned here constitute only a very tiny sample of people who are clearly famous and were ardent believers in reincarnation. Thus, believers in reincarnation are by no means unsuccessful persons indulging in wishful thinking. One might, in fact, rightly say that they are in the company of the greats! I should again stress that the case for reincarnation does not depend on the convictions of famous people. Rather, the arguments fundamentally rest on Christian conceptions of love, justice, and the nature of the Creator.

Prominent Christian Believers in Reincarnation

Christian denominations and individual Christians are divided on the truth of reincarnation. Many churches consider reincarnation anti-Christian and many individual Christians genuinely support the position of their churches in this regard. Unfortunately, too many church officials who propagate anti-reincarnation beliefs do so rather casually; they simply dismiss the idea of reincarnation, even though they have not themselves studied the subject adequately. And there are Christians who, on account of their own culture and personal experience, believe that reincarnation is a fact. But they do not openly profess the belief because they do not want to be seen as going against the teaching of their churches. But that is not the right approach; one should strive for personal conviction on important matters and, having gained conviction, one should not be deterred by any "authority."

But other individual Christians and a few Christian denominations are absolutely convinced that reincarnation is a fact. Such denominations and individuals have become convinced that, without reincarnation, it would be impossible to affirm the absolute justice of God in a logical and convincing manner. They argue that, on both Biblical and logical grounds, reincarnation accords fully with the teachings of Jesus. Moreover, they note that reincarnation helps, in a remarkable way, to clarify the Scriptures and also to deepen our appreciation of the great spiritual gems contained in the Bible. Most Christians who reject reincarnation are unaware that throughout Christian history, many individual Christians, including church officials of

the ranks of cardinals, archbishops, and bishops have expressed belief in reincarnation and have asserted that it is perfectly compatible with Christian teachings. Today, this position is still firmly upheld by many individual Christians and even whole Christian sects.

Let's recall some of the prominent Christians who were convinced of the fact of reincarnation. Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), an English clergyman and Chaplain of King Charles II, believed in reincarnation. He described reincarnation as "a key to unlock the grand mysteries of Providence in relation to man's sin and misery." He remarked that reincarnation was a common belief among Jews in Biblical times and that it was not at all controversial. In support of his belief, he quoted passages from the New Testament as well as from the Book of Wisdom, which is also called the Wisdom of Solomon, is one of the books of the Apocrypha. Rev. William R. Alger (1822-1905), a Unitarian minister, heartily endorsed and advocated reincarnation. He became convinced following an extensive study of the nature, origin, and destiny of the soul. The study, to which he devoted half his lifetime, resulted in the authoritative work *"A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life."* Dr. Edward Beecher (1803-1895), a leading Congregational minister and theologian, wrote that reincarnation is necessary to a reasonable world and to exonerate God from the charge of maliciousness. Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), a famous pulpit orator and a United States bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, was an ardent advocate of reincarnation.

William R. Inge (1860-1954), Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, asserted that reincarnation was not a heathen belief, nor was it alien. He believed that rebirth is plainly implied in the Book of Wisdom which is included in the Roman Catholic versions of the Bible. The Roman Catholic Archbishop Passavalli (1820-1897) was reported to have accepted the truth of reincarnation at the age of 64. He argued that the Church did not condemn reincarnation and that it was not at all in conflict with any Catholic dogma. He was convinced that he had already lived on earth many times.

The Belgian Cardinal and philosopher, Cardinal Mercier (1851-1926), is also reported to have acknowledged that belief in pre-existence and reincarnation had never been formally considered heretical by the Church. Many priests in

Poland and Italy were reported to believe in reincarnation, having come under the influence of the great mystic Andrzej Towianski (1799-1878). Church historians point out that no papal encyclical against reincarnation has ever been issued — a point that should be of particular interest to Roman Catholics. Rev. Leslie D. Weatherhead was President of the City Temple Literary Society of London. In his 1958 lecture entitled "The Case for Reincarnation" he remarked that the intelligent Christian asks not only that life should be just but also that it should make sense. He argues that without reincarnation life can neither be said to be just nor be said to make sense.

The Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.)

The history of the official Church position on reincarnation is a very complex one. Many assume that the Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.), also called the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the Church, condemned the teaching of reincarnation. But some competent church historians have called this assumption into question. The Second Council of Constantinople was called by Emperor Justinian and was convened on May 5, 553 A.D. under the presidency of the Patriarch of Constantinople. But the Emperor, who had engaged in bitter conflict with Pope Vigilius (who was Pope from 535-555 A.D.), was the one who controlled the proceedings. Even though the primary objective was to reconcile the churches of the East and West, the arrangements heavily favored the East. It is reported that of the 165 bishops who signed the acts of the final meeting on June 2, not more than six could have been from the West.

The request of Pope Vigilius for equal representation of bishops from East and West was refused. In protest, the Pope boycotted the meeting even though he had arrived in Constantinople, the venue of the meeting. However, Pope Vigilius, who died in 555 A.D., eventually accepted the decisions of the Council, an action that was not popular in the West and which caused some dioceses, including that of Milan, to break off communion with Rome. Professor Henry Chadwick in his history of the Early Church states that Pope Vigilius "after several further changes of mind finally assented. He (Vigilius) was lucky to die before reaching Rome and the storm awaiting him there." (*The Early Church* revised edition, Penguin Books, 1993, p. 210).

Because of the protestations of Pope Vigilius, the Second Council of

Constantinople did not open on schedule. While the assembled bishops were waiting, Emperor Justinian ordered them to consider a subject (Origenism) that was not an item in the previously announced agenda. In the process, fifteen condemnations (anathemas) proposed by the Emperor against the teachings of Origen (who had died almost 300 years earlier in 254 A.D.) were approved. The very first of the "Anathemas Against Origen" states: "If anyone asserts the fabulous pre-existence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration which follows from it: let him be anathema." The fifteenth anathema stated in part: "If anyone does not anathematize Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Origen as well as their impious writings…let him be anathema." The condemnation of Origen's teachings was taken to imply rejection of pre-existence and reincarnation by the entire church.

There is no evidence that Pope Vigilius, who was at the material time protesting against the arrangements of the Council, approved this action taken by Eastern bishops outside the formal sessions and before the opening of the Council. Thus, it is understandable that some Catholic scholars dissociate the Roman Church from the condemnations of the teachings of Origen, and therefore argue that the Roman Catholic Church has never really condemned the teaching of reincarnation. Many otherwise knowledgeable Christians are unaware of the confusion surrounding the Second Council of Constantinople and the inconclusiveness and uncertainty of its decisions. For this reason, some imagine that they are obliged to uphold this ancient condemnation of reincarnation.

It should be emphasized that Origen, acknowledged as the most learned as well as the most original thinker of the early Christian Fathers, did teach pre-existence and it is reasonable to assert that he believed in reincarnation, although for political reasons, he maintained an ambiguous position. In his book entitled *On First Principles* he explained that God has "arranged the universe on the principle of a most impartial retribution." He wrote that God did not create on the basis of favoritism but gave souls bodies "according to the sin of each." Origen asked: "If souls did not preexist, why is it that we find some blind from birth, having done no sin, while others are born having nothing wrong with them?" Answering his own question, Origen wrote: "It is clear that certain sins existed [i.e. were committed] before the souls [came

into the bodies] and as a result of these sins each soul receives recompense in proportion to its deserts." (Quotations are cited in *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity* by Elizabeth Clare Prophet, page 180; references to the original ancient texts are provided).

Regardless of what might have been the arrangements and decisions of the Second Council of Constantinople, Christians should not necessarily consider themselves bound by decisions taken by some bishops more than 1,400 years ago. It is in fact the case that despite the anathemas, the writings of Origen have been available over the centuries and are still read by Christian theologians even today. Did not the Church condemn Galileo's scientific support of the Copernican theory that the sun, and not the earth, is the center of the solar system? And the ordinary Christian of that day, of course, dutifully joined Church officials in denouncing the Copernican theory. Christians at that time probably imagined that Satan must have put the idea, presumed to contradict the Scriptures, in the mind of Copernicus! Today, some Christians, unfortunately, similarly and uncritically uphold opposition to reincarnation because of the opinions of their church officials.

We now know that Copernicus and Galileo were right all along. Galileo had warned the Church against accepting a literal interpretation of the Scriptures that made the earth the center of the universe. But the Church went ahead and on 5th March 1616 issued a decree declaring Copernican theory "false and erroneous." Galileo was tried in 1633 and found guilty by Church authorities. It was only in the year 1992 (some 355 years later) that the Catholic Church, under the leadership of a highly courageous Pope John Paul II, formally acknowledged the gross error and injustice committed against Galileo in 1633. This incident emphasizes the need for caution when the Church is confronted with new or seemingly controversial ideas, remembering that some traditional teachings of the Church were in the past found to be incorrect. Therefore, even if there were no flaws in the arrangements of the Second Council of Constantinople of 553 A.D., the decisions could still be wrong.

It may be virtuous to accept the opinions of senior church officials, but this should be done only after careful consideration. In this connection, let us recall the need for knowledge as stated by Peter: "For this very reason make

every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with *knowledge* ...” (2 Peter 1:5, italics mine). The effort should not be left to church officials and theologians alone; everyone who wishes to do the Will of God ought to make a personal effort.

Proofs or the Bases for Belief

Many books describe cases or provide what might be considered proofs or at least strong evidence of reincarnation. Ian Stevenson, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, in the United States pioneered the academic study of the phenomenon of reincarnation and became one of the leading authorities in the field. Stevenson earned his Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, in 1943, graduating at the top of his class. In 1957, at the age of 39, he became head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. In that position, Ian Stevenson began his research into reports of children who remembered their past lives. He eventually gave up his administrative duties to become a full-time researcher of reincarnation and assumed the professorial chair endowed by Chester Carlson, the man who invented the Xerox process for copying documents. At his death, Chester Carlson left a will amounting to more than a million dollars to the University of Virginia for the continuation of Ian Stevenson’s research.

In 1960, Dr. Stevenson initiated an international census of cases that suggested or appeared to confirm reincarnation. In each case of children’s past life memory, Stevenson methodically documented the child’s statements. Then he identified the deceased person the child claimed to remember being, and verified the facts of the deceased person’s life that matched the child’s memory. Where there were birthmarks and birth defects on the child, Stevenson tried to check for matching wounds and scars on the body of the deceased by checking medical records. His strictly systematic and meticulous approach ruled out all possible ordinary explanations for the children’s memories. Stevenson’s collection of thousands of cases of children who spontaneously (without hypnosis) remembered a past life offers impressive and rather convincing evidence, if not proof, for reincarnation.

By the late 1990s, he had collected about 3,000 cases. A few years after initiating the project, he published 20 selected cases under the title *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation.* He later published details of

representative samples in a monumental and scholarly four-volume work titled *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (University Press of Virginia, 1977-1983). Stevenson and his team observed that about 35 percent of cases of claimed past lives had birthmarks and birth defects. The birthmarks on the reincarnated person corresponded to points on the body where there had been wounds, usually fatal, on the body of the deceased person. Thus, a child might have birthmarks resembling and matching the entry and exit marks of gunshot wounds that killed the person that the child claimed to have been in its previous life. And one whose finger had been cut in an earlier earth-life may be reborn with the corresponding finger defective. Stevenson studied such cases in detail and in 1997 published a two-volume medical monograph entitled *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects.*

Professor Stevenson's approach would appeal to those Christians who prefer to rely on scientific findings even in spiritual matters. One should remark, however, that the scientific approach is not always feasible and has severe limitations in investigating spiritual topics. Because of the essential limitations of the rational mind, scientific theories can never provide a complete and definitive description of reality. As Fritjof Capra, a physicist, stressed: "Scientists do not deal with truth; they deal with limited approximations of reality."

Many reports of reincarnation have become quite celebrated and widely publicized. Some individuals have written accounts of their own previous earth-lives from knowledge acquired through spontaneous recollection. Edward W. Ryall was one such case. Ryall, born in 1902 in Essex, England, has described in great detail his life as John Fletcher, born in 1645 in Somerset, England and killed in 1685 by a cavalryman in the army of King James II. Ian Stevenson found that Ryall's account of 17th century England was astonishingly detailed and historically accurate. After his exhaustive investigation of Ryall's case, Professor Ian Stevenson was fully convinced that no fraud was involved. Edward W. Ryall published his story under the title *Born twice: total recall of a seventeenth-century life* (New York, Harper & Row, 1974). His story was first published in England as *Second Time Around.*

Jenny Cockell born in England in 1954 had, from early childhood, recurrent visions and vivid memories of herself as a young Irish woman by the name of Mary who died from complications of childbirth leaving behind some children about whom she was especially anxious. The memories were detailed enough to help her piece together a profile of her past life. She could visualize rather well the environment where she lived as Mary and was able to sketch maps of the area.

Those memories spurred her on a quest for her life as Mary when she became an adult. She eventually established that the woman she identified with was Mary Sutton who died in 1933 at age 35 in Malahide on the outskirts of Dublin. She was able to locate her past residence — a cottage which had become dilapidated. With further research, she was able to find the addresses of Mary Sutton's children and eventually reunited with them in 1991. By then, the children (that is, her children in her past life) were aged between 58 and 72. In her conversations with them, Jenny was able to recall many events of their childhood which they corroborated. Thus, strange as it sounded, these people in their 50's, 60's and 70's were face to face with their mother who had died 58 years earlier and was now reincarnated as a young woman of 37.

The story of Jenny Cockell was published in the United Kingdom in 1993 by Piatkus Books Ltd as *Yesterday's Children: The Extraordinary Search for My Past Life Family*. *Yesterday's Children* was made into a movie of the same title. And in the United States the account was published by Simon & Schuster as *Across Time and Death: Search for Her Past Life Children*. Jenny Cockell's story has been summarized in many magazines and in books on reincarnation.

In addition to those who spontaneously recall their own previous incarnations, others are led to such "self-recognition" while undergoing hypnosis. Through the process called hypnotic regression, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people are reported in published accounts to have acquired vivid recollections of critical events in their previous earth-lives. The book on reincarnation written by David Hammerman and Lisa David and published in the book series "Complete Idiot's Guide" gives accounts of many recollections of past lives resulting from hypnotic regression. It should be stated here that hypnosis always hurts the human spirit, regardless of

whatever good it may appear to do to the physical body. The harm arises from the fact that hypnosis leads to a binding of the spirit and exposes it to dangers against which it cannot defend itself. The harmful consequences are real, although they may often not be immediately physically obvious. It is, therefore, unwise to permit oneself to be hypnotized for whatever reason.

Some people have the rare ability of being able to “see” another person’s previous incarnations through looking at the person or the person’s photograph. Others get to know of clients’ past lives when in a state of trance. The famous American seer, Edgar Cayce, revealed the past incarnations of many who consulted him, usually while he was in a trance. Many of his visions, called “readings”, including recollections of the past lives of many clients, are available in published books.

Prodigies, meaning persons who show early signs of genius or exceptional abilities along certain lines are also thought to provide evidence of reincarnation. These prodigies are presumed to have acquired their skills in previous earth-lives, and these skills surface again in their current earth-lives. It is for this reason that the phenomenon of prodigies is often considered suggestive of reincarnation. They include musical prodigies like Mozart, Schubert, and Mendelssohn, all of whom began to compose before the age of 12 as well as Johann Hummel, Chopin, and Yehudi Menuhin who gave public concerts by 11 years of age. There was the case of a black American, popularly known as the Blind Slave Boy — Thomas Greene Bethune — “thrown in free” to General James Bethune with the sale of the boy’s mother at a slave auction in Columbus, Georgia, U.S.A. Blind Tom made his debut at the age of seven on the concert stage in Columbus to a widely applauding audience. By the time he was 15, Blind Tom had participated in many concerts in and outside the United States. He was playing Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Bach, Chopin, etc. He was reported to know at least 5,000 compositions by heart. He would hear a composition played once and could then repeat it without error.

Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston have produced a very important and valuable sourcebook on reincarnation. The book is in four parts: Reincarnation in the World’s Religions; Western Thinkers on Reincarnation; Scientists and Psychologists on Reincarnation; and Scientists and Psychologists on

Immortality and "Soul" and Related Concepts (Wheaton, Illinois/London, *Reincarnation: an East-West Anthology including quotations from the world's religions and from over 400 western thinkers*, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961. x, 341p.) Among the religions for which pieces of evidence for belief in reincarnation are provided are Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. The various kinds of evidence and arguments that are thought to prove that reincarnation is a fact are summarized by Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston in their large book entitled *Reincarnation; the Phoenix fire mystery: an East-West dialogue on death and rebirth from the worlds of religion, science, psychology, philosophy, art, and literature, and from great thinkers of the past and present* (New York, Julian Press/Crown Publishers, 1977).

The Christian Basis for Belief

Perhaps the greatest "proof" of reincarnation from the point of view of a believing and thinking Christian follows from the following simple reasoning: Reincarnation is the only system that shows that God is just and loving in all His ways; that He is *not* like an arbitrary earthly king. It is the only "theory" that successfully explains the conviction of every believer that God is absolutely just and loving. Every believer associates God with justice and love. Without reincarnation, there would be no basis to speak of justice and love in God's relationship with human beings. This basis for belief is explained and demonstrated in various ways in this book. In the process, it is demonstrated that those who are unequivocally convinced about the Justice and Love of the Creator must necessarily accept reincarnation as a fact.

A Christian would, additionally, wish to examine what the Scriptures have to say about the subject of reincarnation. This has been done comprehensively in Chapters 7 and 8. The Justice and Love of the Creator, which are inseparable attributes, and the Perfection of the Divine Will expressed in certain simple immutable laws are the foundation on which the case for reincarnation and the explanations of its mechanism are built. These Divine Laws, also called the Laws of Creation, manifest the Will of God; they are the subject of the whole of Chapter 9.

Alternatives to Reincarnation

To put matters in perspective, it is useful for a Christian to consider the

alternatives to reincarnation. In other words, a Christian who rejects reincarnation should ask himself or herself what he or she believes.

One who does not believe in reincarnation may hold the point of view of the extreme materialist. This is that human beings are no more than their physical bodies and once the bodies perish, it is all over. The extreme materialist assumes that there are no souls and no spirits and there are, therefore, no entities inherent in human beings that can be reborn on earth; hence for such a person reincarnation is not a meaningful concept. Of course, such materialists do not believe in God and for them the Christian ideas of Divine Love and Divine Justice simply do not exist. Thus, whether or not the Will of God with the natural system that arose from it is just or unjust and whether or not love is built into the system are non-issues. As far as the materialist is concerned, life on earth is a chance occurrence, a random phenomenon. This point of view cannot be that of a Christian in the normal definition of the word. Thus, one should be able to state that this materialist stand cannot or should not be a Christian alternative to reincarnation.

At any rate, the materialist point of view is becoming increasingly untenable even scientifically. Wilder Penfield, a neurosurgeon, came to the scientific conclusion that the human being is more than the physical body. In his book summarizing his specialized research on the working of the brain he wrote:

> I worked as a scientist trying to prove that the brain accounted for the mind (consciousness) and demonstrating as many brain-mechanisms as possible hoping to show how the brain did so. In presenting this monograph, I do not begin with a conclusion and I do not end by making a final and unalterable one. Instead, I reconsider the present-day neurophysiological evidence on the basis of two hypotheses: (a) that man's being consists of one fundamental element, and (b) that it consists of two. In the end I conclude that there is no good evidence, in spite of new methods such as the employment of stimulating electrodes, the study of conscious patients, and the analysis of epileptic attacks, that the brain alone can carry out the work that the mind does. I conclude that it is easier to rationalize man's being on the basis of two elements than on the basis of one.

Like Dr. Wilder Penfield, Sir John Eccles, who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1963, came to the conclusion that the mind (consciousness) is a

separable entity from the brain, and that mental processes cannot be reduced to neurochemical brain processes but on the contrary direct them. And like Penfield, Eccles also thinks that a mind may conceivably exist without a brain. Eccles postulated a two-way interaction between brain and mind, with "brain receiving from conscious mind in a willed action and in turn transmitting to mind in a conscious experience." While not stating his personal conviction about life after death, Eccles did write: "At least I would maintain that this possibility of a future existence cannot be denied on scientific grounds." In simple words, brain research suggests that the human being is more than the physical body, that life after death is a possibility, and that, therefore, the extreme materialist is wrong.

Many studies of people who had been certified clinically dead but who subsequently came back to life (these are popularly called "near-death experiences") prove that consciousness continues after death. This means that after the brain has ceased to function, there is still a part of the human being, separate from the physical body, which continues to exist. Those involved in near-death experiences are able to give detailed accounts of what transpired during the interval they were clinically dead. Even the blind among such people are able to describe visual events. What these studies suggest is that the relationship between the brain and consciousness is not one of cause and effect; rather the brain functions as an intermediary between the soul (the source of consciousness) and the physical body. In other words, the brain acts like a receiver-transmitter, passing messages from the body to the soul and from the soul to the body. The death of the brain would put a stop to reception but it would not mean that consciousness ceases; for destroying the radio on one's bedside table does not destroy the source of radio transmission.

Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician, regarded as the "Father of Medicine", described the brain as "the messenger to consciousness" and as "the interpreter for consciousness." Thus, one can say that the idea that the brain functions as an intermediary is an ancient one. The general conclusion seems to be that "matter is not what produces consciousness but what limits it and confines its intensity within certain limits." We may, therefore, conclude that there is now scientific evidence that life continues after death, contrary to the viewpoint of the extreme materialist.

There are people who, unlike the extreme materialist, accept that the human being lives after death in the form of a soul. The understanding of the nature of the soul, however, varies among such people. As their alternative to reincarnation, some of such people believe that the soul is created by God for each earthly birth, presumably at conception. Thus, each birth brings a new soul to the earth and the soul goes through only one earth-life. This point of view means, for example, that God would create a soul for a body that would be stillborn and would have no further opportunity to experience an earth-life. In some cases, not only would the baby be stillborn, the mother dies in the process. The figures for infant mortalities around the world suggest that millions of children die before they attain the age of five. In other words, those who do not believe in reincarnation imagine that God creates millions of brand new souls which are to live on earth for short spans of less than five years; such short spans would be all the experience of life on earth these millions of freshly created souls would ever get.

Let's take a moment to reflect on that viewpoint. Would a wise Creator engage in the wasteful activity of creating millions of souls for bodies that are to be stillborn or to live on earth for five years or much less? To hold such a view amounts, in my opinion, to blasphemy. It is not a viewpoint of which a Christian should be proud. The reality of stillborn babies and infant deaths make sense only in the light of a scheme in which such souls are not new creations but rather have been on earth before and/or will have future opportunities to be born again to experience full earth-lives. Reincarnation is such a scheme. Without reincarnation, one would have to ask the basis for the assignment of souls to stillborn bodies. In other words, on what basis would God decide which souls to assign to dead fetuses, if He is neither arbitrary nor unjust?

Furthermore, to believe that God creates souls every time there is procreation is to hold that God's creative actions in this respect depend on the whims and caprices of men and women. It is a fact that procreation is often the result of casual and irresponsible sexual acts. This would mean, for example, that the actions of rapists sometimes compel God to create new souls. That is not a lofty view of the Creator. The sublimity of God can only be discerned in these matters in the light of reincarnation as well as the unalterable Laws of

Creation; Laws which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

A further concern arises in connection with those who believe that each birth is the result of a newly created soul. What happens to the soul that is assigned to a stillborn body? Is that its permanent end? If it is, what was the point of its creation? If not, what happens to it? Does it go to hell or to heaven or to some limbo? On what would such a decision be based? To hold that a soul that has experienced what may be best described as a brief spasm of one-time existence on earth would qualify for eternal bliss or eternal misery is to suggest that there is no rhyme or reason to God's actions. One has to admit that the belief that souls are freshly created at each birth and for one single earth-life leads to a great deal of confusion and casts a dark shadow on the activity of a perfect Creator. It is simply a bad alternative to reincarnation. These issues and the whole question of the fate of the dead are dealt with in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Christianity and the Fate of the Dead

The teachings which demand blind faith are to be discarded as dead and therefore pernicious! Only those teachings can bring liberation and redemption which, like Christ's, prompt man to greater mobility, that is, make him consider and examine and thus gain conviction through real understanding! ("In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Volume II, Lecture "*I Am the Lord Thy God!"*)

If we go to the root of the matter, it is our concept of death that decides our answers to all the questions which life poses.
(Dag Hammarskjöld, Late Secretary General of the United Nations).

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In this Chapter, I discuss and answer the question: what, in the beliefs of Christians, happens to a person after physical death? To form the right conception of reincarnation, one needs to have a clear answer to this question. But, for many reasons, it is not easy to answer the question from a Christian point of view. The reasons include the fact that there are many Christian sects in the world today among which there may sometimes be major differences in beliefs as well as in practices. In some sects the Bible is of central importance; in others, it is merely acknowledged as various other issues come first. Among those for whom the Bible is the focus, some interpret it literally, while others realize that literal interpretations of the Bible can sometimes lead to absurd conclusions. There are yet others who accept the New Testament but not the Old. Some believe miracles ended with the disciples and apostles. But miracles, here and now, are the real reasons for the existence of some Christian churches. Some Christian sects accept the fact of reincarnation; others do not. Some believe birth control is compatible with Christianity while others regard it as an unqualified sin.

These differences in what constitute Christian beliefs are, of course, not new. Even in the early Church, before the Middle Ages, such differences cropped up and there were excommunications and anathemas (an anathema is a ban, a curse, or vigorous denunciation solemnly pronounced by church authorities and sometimes accompanied by ex-communication). But the second half of the 20th century has witnessed a great proliferation of Christian and other religious sects. This development has compounded the problem to the extent that many individual Christians today are not sure what they are supposed to believe. There is even talk, paradoxically and absurdly, of Christian atheism — belief in the ethical values of Christianity but not necessarily in the existence of God.

For the above reason, it is not easy to affirm a particular viewpoint on a subject as the Christian position. This poses a big challenge for all Christians who must ascertain for themselves individually what to believe. For no one can escape the consequences of his/her individual wrong concepts or false beliefs. In the absence of a universal Christian position, what one may do is to discuss those viewpoints that appear to be the predominant ones or those that are most frequently advocated. This is the approach taken in discussing the subject of this Chapter.

The Idea of Preliminary Judgments

A common belief is that the dead person undergoes a preliminary judgment and goes directly to heaven or to hell according to how he conducted his earth-life. Those who hold that belief, consider such a judgment an interim one, a preliminary one, because the same Christians invariably also expect a Last or Final Judgment for everybody, including those who died long before the Mission of Jesus Christ. In effect, the Last Judgment might only be a mere confirmation of the interim judgment.

It should be remarked that it is not clear what Christians are supposed to understand by “hell” or “heaven” as these concepts are not usually explicated. Is “hell” supposed to be any place of torment or some single particular location? Let’s note that, even right here on earth, there are conditions and situations that can only be described as hell. The Book of Revelation in the Bible has the following passages on the Last/Final Judgment:

> And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:13-15)
>
> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband … (Rev. 21:1-2)

The above passages suggest that hell itself will be judged and cast into "the lake of fire". The second passage indicates that there is not just one heaven, for it states that the "first heaven" would pass away and the holy city would come down out of heaven (presumably another heaven) from God.

The point of view, that the dead person undergoes a preliminary judgment and goes directly to heaven or to hell according to how he conducted his earth-life, was adopted at the Council of Lyons in 1274. It was stated that after death the soul goes *promptly* either to heaven or to hell and that on the Day of Judgment all will stand before the tribunal of Christ with their bodies to render account of what they have done.

The expression "dust to dust" is used when the dead body of a Christian is being committed to the earth, in recognition of the reality that the body will degrade into its basic chemical elements. Yet the doctrine of some churches expects the same body to stand before the judge for the Last Judgment. I suppose such people also imagine that the ashes of a cremated body thrown into the river would somehow aggregate and give rise to the original body again. Such a teaching simply doesn't make sense.

Emerging from the Council of Florence of 1439 was the same doctrine expressed in almost the same words as those of the Council of Lyons; the statement described the swift passage of the soul to heaven or to hell. Implicit in the position taken by both Councils is the idea that there is no reincarnation.

The above doctrine implies the possibility of a situation where a man who lived during the time of our Lord Jesus Christ and died at the age of 20, for example, has remained for about two thousand years in an interim state of bliss or perdition. And this millennia-long state would be an interim penalty or reward for what he did right or wrong during a short earth-life of 20 years. It could even be a baby who lived for only one month or less; it would have been staying in heaven or hell, on an interim basis for the last two thousand years and on account of acts of commission or omission during one month! This idea of preliminary judgments is different from purgatory, which I will discuss later in this Chapter.

Consider a hypothetical case: Mr. Stone was a respectable man, well-known in his community for his kindness, honesty, and fair play. Unfortunately, his daughter was raped. In a fit of anger he murdered the rapist. Is he languishing in hell awaiting confirmation of his sentence on the day of the Final Judgment or might we assume that he has been given an opportunity to atone for the murder? And what happens to still-born babies? On what basis are they judged? This scheme of immediate judgment to be followed by a confirmation during the Last Judgment seems to me a ridiculous one, unworthy of a wise human being, much less of God.

One could define “hell” as any gathering in the Beyond of souls who have similar characteristics and tendencies that *go against* the Will of God. And as individual members of a particular gathering change, they cease to belong to that gathering and join other groups that are more “like-minded.” “Heaven” would in like manner be defined as the gathering of souls with volition and tendencies that are *in tune* with the Will of God. As individual souls change for better or for worse, they would automatically get reassigned to more homogeneous groups. No soul would be stuck in any permanent state to await the Last Judgment; each soul would always have opportunities for change and thereby would remain master of its own fate until the Final Judgment. Defined in this way, such “hells” and “heavens” would not be permanent abodes of souls awaiting the Last Judgment. And souls there could be reborn on earth into circumstances appropriate to their level of maturity and their needs for further development.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

It is sadly true that many people have never examined what they believe; and this is true with respect to the fate of the dead. But some Christians who have reflected on the subject cite the story of the rich but uncompassionate man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31). Lazarus, the beggar, died and "was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom". *Today's English Version* of the Bible renders it as "was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven." The rich man died, was buried, and wound up in Hades, the place of torment. This story is held as an indication that the dead goes straight to Paradise or to hell. But the point of the story is the need to show compassion to destitute persons (although we are not explicitly told that the rich man was not compassionate). There is no justification in interpreting the story literally to mean that at death poor people go straight to heaven while uncompassionate rich people go to hell, a permanent place of torment. Some poor people, unlike Lazarus in this story, may in fact be quite evil and would not deserve to go to heaven (in the sense of Paradise or some luminous part of the Beyond). One would expect that there would be different places of torment to reflect different levels of bad conduct of rich people and that they would not all wind up in the same place. Some might even be expected to go to heaven or places where there would be opportunities for rich wrong-doers to change.

It should be noted that in Hades, the rich man had become repentant and had developed some measure of concern and compassion for others as evidenced by his desire to save his five brothers from the torment of hell. He pleaded with Abraham to send somebody from heaven to warn his brothers who were still on earth. Incidentally, Abraham did not say that it was not possible to send somebody from heaven to the earth. Abraham did say that it was not possible simply to walk across from heaven to hell or the other way. He certainly did not imply that it was impossible for somebody in the Beyond to come to the earth, through the process of a rebirth. Abraham refused to send somebody to the earth only because such a person would, in his opinion, be performing a somewhat redundant role — for, "they have Moses and the prophets."

One might justifiably wonder why, in this case, there was no thought of forgiveness; neither was there an indication of a path towards eventual

redemption for the rich man. The rich man had already recognized his faults, and if given another chance could reasonably be expected to change. Would it be justice to keep such a person in hell until the day of the Last Judgment? Would the cause of justice and love not be better served by another chance on earth?

The Penitent Thief on the Cross

Some Christians base their belief that dead persons are immediately judged and sent to Paradise or hell on the statement of Jesus Christ to one of the two thieves on the cross: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). First, we have no basis to assume that this was a typical situation. There are no grounds to interpret this as typical of what happens to all dead persons. On the contrary, it was a most unusual circumstance.

Here was a man, who while suffering the indescribable agony of crucifixion, recognized the nature of Jesus and the fact of Christ's innocence. He chastised the other thief who had railed at Jesus asking why Jesus would not save Himself and them, if he were really the Christ. The penitent thief stated: "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40-41). He then made the fervent request: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

The majority of Jews and Romans, including the religious leaders and teachers of that time, did not recognize the nature of Jesus and would not have thought of requesting Him to remember them when He got to His Luminous Kingdom. The religious leaders, in particular, saw Him as an upstart and a threat to the power they wielded over the masses. Whatever his past might have been, the penitent thief at that point of his crucifixion must have considerably matured spiritually. He had developed a keen sense of justice to the extent of accepting that he deserved to be crucified. He thus acknowledged (or confessed) his sin, for which he was dying in the most painful way.

The full recognition of his guilt and of his deserved punishment combined

with his fervent and trusting plea that Jesus should remember him when He was in His Luminous Kingdom had the effect of immediate redemption of *all* his guilt. All his past wrong-doing that might have necessitated further incarnations on earth and prevented his ascent to Paradise were thereby redeemed. Anyone freed from all guilt and no longer burdened with anything could, in accordance with the Divine Laws of Creation (outlined in Chapter 9), instantly rise to Paradise upon dropping the physical body at earthly death. That was what happened in the case of the penitent thief on the cross. And note that such souls would no longer need to undergo any Last Judgment.

How many human beings ever rise to the level of spiritual maturity demonstrated by this penitent thief? Very few, indeed! What do most of us do when we are suffering for our sins? We ask "why me?" Thus, this case is not a typical one and cannot be generalized to all humanity; rather, here we see, in action, Divine Grace responding to humble and sincere repentance. We should note that we were not told that the other thief went straight to hell (in the sense of a permanent abode where to await the Last Judgment). Obviously, he could not have gone to Paradise. This other thief, while being literally crucified for a crime he committed, showed no sign of repentance but on the contrary was committing another sin — that of reviling Christ. Is it not possible that in the Justice of the Almighty, he would be permitted further opportunities for atonement and spiritual maturing?

It should also be mentioned that we cannot assume that the two thieves had not been incarnated on earth before. To say that they were on earth for the first time would be a baseless assumption. The Bible does not tell us so, and we can only say, in all simplicity and humility, that we do not know. Thus, neither Christ's declaration to the penitent thief on the cross nor any other statement He made gives us any reasonable grounds to believe that every dead person is immediately judged and assigned *permanently* to hell or to heaven to await the Last Judgment.

In many cultures, the earth is described as a market place. When one goes to the market to sell or buy, one returns home as soon as one has completed one's purchases or sales. If one is unable to complete one's transactions in one visit, one usually has another chance to visit the market again. In an

analogous manner, life on earth provides opportunities for spiritual maturing. Anyone who has attained the requisite maturity no longer needs an earth-life. If such a person does not also need further maturing in the intervening worlds between the earth and Paradise, then he may well go straight to Paradise. The penitent thief, with Christ's blessings, was presumably such a case. On the other hand, an immature spirit or one that is not sufficiently mature does not go straight to Paradise nor is it immediately condemned to everlasting hell; it gets other opportunities, in accordance with the laws that manifest God's Divine Grace.

Second Coming and Rapture

Let us further deepen our knowledge of Christian beliefs about what happens to the dead by considering the history of Christianity. Many baptized early Christians were convinced that the Second Coming of Christ would take place in their own lifetimes. They thought they would go directly into the Kingdom of God without going through the process of dying. Others expected that they would go through the air to meet Christ returning upon the clouds of the sky:

> Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18).

The imminent expectation of the Second Coming of Christ (what theologians refer to as the Parousia) was not fulfilled. Early Christians, therefore, had to confront the issue of what happens to a dead person in the period between death and the Last Judgment. One view they came up with was that of an individual judgment, which takes place immediately after death and brings the individual to an interim, preliminary state, from which he enters the realm of bliss or of perdition.

This is the view still held by many Christians and which we have already shown to lack love and justice. Moreover, this view makes the Last Judgment, as understood by most Christians, a rather trivial affair, since it merely confirms an earlier judgment.

The Sleep of the Soul

A related idea that early Christians promoted was that of the sleep of the soul. Since the Second Coming of Christ was thought imminent, any Christian who died before it occurred was considered simply "asleep in Christ." That is, the soul of the dead person enters into a sleeping state that continues until the Last Judgment, which would occur after the general resurrection. In this view, at the Last Judgment, the resurrected souls would be lifted to eternal life or condemned to everlasting damnation.

Many, perhaps most people in the western world, still today subscribe to the concept of the sleep of the soul. Most likely, they hold this belief without realizing that they do. Whenever such people pray for or remember a dead person, they say, "May his/her soul rest in peace." The same prayer is commonly found in obituaries. The wish that a dead person should idle away, do nothing in the Beyond, is so common that virtually everybody knows what "R.I.P." means. (For the few who may not know, R.I.P. stands for Rest In Peace, or in Latin *Requiescat In Pace!*) It is strange that even those who believe in purgatory (discussed below) pray that the dead should "rest in peace."

The prevalent and unquestioning use of R.I.P. is one piece of evidence of how little we think about matters connected with death and dying as well as many other points of doctrine. And it is also a sad indication that many people are so unhappy with their earthly occupations and professions that they think that it must be great to rest endlessly. Many people simply cannot associate joy and happiness with work and activity. But we really should always wish departed ones joyful *activity* and progress in their continuing spiritual *striving*.

The concept of the sleep of the soul also implies some ridiculous possibilities. For example, a baby who died at the age of six months 2,000 years ago would have remained in a state of sleep ever since awaiting the Last Judgment. What a waste! To restate this concept: the human personality is preserved in an intermediate state of sleep for an indefinite period to be punished later for sins it committed or be rewarded for good deeds it performed prior to entrance into the sleep of the soul. But this, in effect, means that we cannot seriously speak about the continuity of life; for a person's existence is

interrupted by thousands of years of sleep of the soul. During this long and indefinite period of soul sleep, the spirit could not gain in maturity nor would it have any opportunity for atonement.

Purgatory

Another idea that some Christians came to accept was that of purgatory. Purgatory is supposed to be an intermediate state after death where the soul undergoes punishment as an opportunity for repentance and penance and from which it may proceed to heaven. Thus, purgatory assumes that there is a special judgment for each individual at once after death to decide whether he is to go straight to heaven or via the route of purgatory. But there are also problems with this concept.

There are, for example, also questions regarding those who spend too short a time on earth to be fairly judged as bad or good and, therefore, to be presumed to need or not to require purgatory. Consider, for example, a one-month old baby that dies. And those born in circumstances that severely limit the experiences they can possibly acquire on earth. Take a man, who is born lame, deaf and dumb and dies after a life of limited experiencing but one of deep sorrow. Does he go to Paradise simply on account of the handicaps he was born with? Are physical handicaps passports to Paradise? Would he go to purgatory? If so, to atone or be punished for what? Cases like these might lead anyone who does not know of the Laws of Creation to question the wisdom and meaning of such persons' lives and to wonder if there is any rhyme or reason to existence.

To say that the ways of the Lord are mysterious is simply to admit ignorance. Such an attitude suggests a definite lack of conviction that the Almighty is rigorously logical, absolutely just, and perfect in His ways. We ought to avoid statements which cast doubt on the unquestionable fact that God is the constant dispenser of love and justice. As soon as we admit the fact of reincarnation and the truth of the immutable Laws of Creation (see Chapter 9), we find that there are no mysteries in the circumstances of birth.

Here is another dimension of the problem. What happens (or what has happened) to those who died before Christ came on His Mission of Salvation? According to an old belief, Jesus descended into Hades (Sheol)

and saved the spirits of the good men and women of old. How about the bad men and women of old? How would they achieve atonement? And what happened to the dwellers of Hades saved by Christ? Some medieval scholars like Dante thought that those people who died before the time of Christ could never attain the perfect vision of God described as "supernatural" enjoyment. Their fate was said to be unending "natural" enjoyment in a condition called limbo (the *Limbus patrum*). This belief implies that there would be "first class" and "second class" citizens among those saved by Christ. The implication is that ordinary men living today could hope to have a higher standing with God than such great prophets as Moses, Elijah and Isaiah who died before Christ came. Moreover, it hardly makes sense nor is it just to expect ordinary Christians who "barely make it" to heaven to have greater "enjoyment" than the great prophets of old.

Another dilemma that early Christianity faced had to do with the fate of infants and others who died before receiving baptism; that is, those who had not received the sacrament deemed necessary to wipe out original sin. The church assured anxious mothers that their babies would not go to hell. But neither would they ever be able to go to Paradise. Such babies would go to the limbo of infants (*Limbus infantium*) where they would enjoy happiness but not the bliss of heaven. The same or similar fate was thought to befall good and righteous people who, for one reason or another, did not receive Christian baptism. Note that limbo, unlike purgatory, is a permanent condition. Thus, all members of Christian sects (such as Quakers and Salvationists) who do not include baptism in their practice would be excluded from heaven and be granted places only in limbo, even if their lives had been truly exemplary. This is, of course, another injustice that cannot possibly be compatible with the Will of God.

The traditional concept of limbo has been held by the Catholic Church for centuries. But on April 20, 2007, the Catholic Church published a document releasing the results of several years of study on the matter of limbo of infants by the Vatican's International Theological Commission. The document declared that the teaching should no longer hold as it seemed to reflect an "unduly restrictive view of salvation." The report claimed that there was greater theological awareness today that God is merciful and "wants all human beings to be saved." "People find it increasingly difficult to accept

that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants, who have no personal sins, from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian," the 41-page document stated. The report asserted that Grace has priority over sin, and that the exclusion of innocent babies from heaven does not seem to reflect Christ's special love for children. Thus, the report concluded that there are good reasons to hope that babies who die without being baptized do go to heaven and enjoy the "beatific vision."

This development in the Catholic Church is a welcome move away from rigid adherence to church traditions and should be applauded. I can only hope that all Christian sects will one day formally acknowledge that reincarnation, correctly conceived, is central to Divine Justice and Mercy.

Reincarnation as Purgatory

But purgatory may be considered from another angle. Some theologians have reflected on the idea of purgatory in relation to reincarnation. One such theologian was Geddes MacGregor, a one-time professor at the University of Southern California. In his book *(Reincarnation as a Christian hope,* Totowa, N.J., Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), he reviews various conceptions of purgatory in the history of Christianity. He finds that a widely accepted notion of purgatory is that of an intermediate state in which, after death, the soul goes on to an undesignated place in which it has opportunities for further growth and development. He notes that even members of Christian sects that traditionally condemn purgatory hold this view. For example, one of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion to which every candidate for ordination in the Church of England was required to subscribe, specifically condemned the "Romish Doctrine concerning purgatory." But, this did not stop certain groups (the Tractarians) within the Church of England from subscribing to purgatory disguised as a doctrine of the after-life conceived as a process of growth and development.

If one interprets purgatory as a state in which opportunities for further growth and development are provided after death, one may logically ask: what sort of state or what sort of place might it be? Wherever it may be, Geddes MacGregor argues that it would be eminently reasonable to assume that it would not be completely alien or different from life on earth. He believes that it would, indeed, be logical to ask if such a state, such opportunities for further growth and development, might not be on earth. That is, might purgatory not, at least in some cases, be a return to earth (reincarnation)

rather than a continuing life elsewhere? Thus, some theologians, like Professor MacGregor, suggest that an earth-life may in fact be purgatory for some people; which is to say that reincarnation, an earthly rebirth, may be considered a form of purgatory.

Teachings Are Unsatisfactory

Church teachings about life after death outlined above still represent the accepted beliefs of various Christian denominations. Which particular teaching a Christian accepts will, of course, depend on the sect to which he/she belongs. In practice, many Christians do not know what they are supposed to believe about the fate of the dead. Who can blame them? It is clear from the above that Christian teachings about the fate of the dead are unsatisfactory.

Indeed, many contemporary Christian theologians have bemoaned the creed regarding "the life of the world to come." They describe it as more muddled, more confused than any other aspect of Christian theology. In this connection, one should make a distinction between what Jesus Christ Himself actually taught and teachings such as the ones we have been considering. The latter were thought out or agreed upon by church conclaves and Christian organizations; such teachings can be wrong.

I am convinced that these doctrines, and any new ones thought of, will remain muddled for as long as they do not reflect clarity about the nature of the human being, his purpose on earth, and the reality of life in the non-physical realms. As Richard Steinpach, the late Austrian natural philosopher and lawyer wrote: "To become clear about death really means to occupy oneself rightly with life." Reincarnation is an essential element of this new knowledge about death and life. It will become evident in later Chapters how reincarnation helps us to paint a clear and logical picture of the after-life, while doing honor to the Love and Justice of God.

Suppose tomorrow were the day of the Last Judgment. What would happen to babies and children? Would they go to Paradise even if they had not become spiritually mature? Would they go to hell for being immature as a result of coming too late to the earth? Any rational and just scheme must be such as to have given everybody comparable opportunities to rise or to fall, to ascend to

Paradise or to descend into hell. Only the phenomenon of reincarnation or rebirth, and the associated knowledge that all of us have been here many times before guarantee a just and rational scheme. In the context of reincarnation, today's babies and children are, in fact, old souls; they have all lived on earth before. Only their present physical bodies, the garments their souls must wear for the present earth-lives, are new or young.

I contend that one cannot come to a right understanding of the fate of the dead nor of the explanation for the diverse circumstances of the living without accepting the correct conception of reincarnation. Nor can we appreciate Divine Love and Divine Justice — two inseparable attributes of God — if we reject reincarnation or do not understand its mechanism.

That the Love of God cannot be separated from His Justice must be emphasized. This is particularly necessary at a time when it is becoming fashionable to talk about God being loving and not "judgmental." Leaders of some Christian denominations imagine and teach that the God of the Old Testament was concerned with Justice, whereas the God of the New Testament is Love and is all-forgiving. But, of course, God does not change. Such a belief is wrong.

Even in the Old Testament, God *did* show Love to the people of Israel when they acted according to His Will. On the other hand, let us remember that in the New Testament, it is reported that Jesus told His disciples:

> Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law, until all is accomplished (Matthew 5: 17-18).

God's laws do not and cannot change because they are perfect. By definition, perfection cannot be improved upon. Make the slightest change to what is perfect and it becomes imperfect. We should also recall that Jesus drove money-changers from the temple. Even in His Justice, God shows His Love, and His Love carries Justice. There is more to be said about this matter, and we shall return to it in Chapter 10 when we explore the issue of forgiveness. Meanwhile, let us state the essential point by quoting from The Grail

Message, “In the light of Truth”:

> The new Gospel of Love does not intend to overthrow or annul the old Gospel of Justice, *but to supplement* and unite with it.
>
> Therefore, do not forget the Justice of the mighty Creator of all things, which cannot be moved by even so much as a hair’s breadth, and which stands inviolable from the very beginning of the world until its end! (Volume II, Lecture “The Redeemer”).

Chapter 6. Is it “Appointed for Men to Die Once”?

He who accepts important matters without question *and professes them as his own conviction shows boundless indifference and no true belief!*

And it is in this *light that such a person stands before Him Whom he customarily calls the Highest and the Holiest, Who should represent the purpose and the support of his whole being!*

As such he is not a live member of his religion who may expect ascent and redemption, rather he is but “sounding brass”, only an empty “tinkling cymbal”, one who neither understands the Laws of his Creator nor troubles to recognize them!

For all who act thus it means standstill and retrogression on the road meant to lead them in their development and advancement through the World of Matter towards the Light of Truth!

(“In the Light of Truth”, *The Grail Message, Volume II, Lecture “The Resurrection of Christ’s Physical Body”)*

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We have shown in Chapter 5 that the case against reincarnation based on the idea that a dead person is judged immediately and sent to hell or heaven to await, indefinitely, the Last Judgment cannot be taken seriously. Only those who are willing to accept an unjust Creator can accept that argument against reincarnation. Another argument frequently used against reincarnation derives from a misinterpretation of the following Bible passage taken from Hebrews (9:27 – 28):

> *And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment*; so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,

will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Italics added).

For purposes of argument, opponents of reincarnation usually cite only the first part of the above passage from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, *"And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment."* But the theme, of which the two paragraphs are only a part, is not life after death, rebirth or reincarnation, nor is it judgment. The essential point of the passage is the sacrifice represented by the sacred Mission of Jesus Christ and a caution that Jesus is not going to repeat that sacrifice again.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Let us consider relevant historical background. From the second century, there has been debate about the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Although in some versions of the Bible the name of the author is given as St. Paul, Bible scholars believe that there is nothing in the original manuscript concerning the author. Because Clement of Rome (95 A.D.) quoted profusely from it, some people thought that he might have written it. Its doctrine has the overtones of those of Paul and it is presumed that the author might have come under the influence of Paul. But Bible scholars believe that Hebrews was not written by Paul himself. As one commentator puts it, "the truth is that nobody knows who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews." For this reason, neither the King James Version nor the Revised Standard Version of the Bible gives Paul as the author, whereas all the letters of Paul are specified as such.

For more than 200 years, some Christians refused to accept the Epistle to the Hebrews as a rightful part of the Holy Scriptures. Their main objection was that the Epistle seemed to hold no hope for professing Christians who at some stage had renounced Christ. To save their lives, many early Church members had taken the oath to Caesar and renounced Christ. Some of such people later wished to rejoin the Church but many members who had remained steadfast refused reinstatement of those who had not and a great controversy arose. Those who felt that such persons should be reinstated did not like the *Epistle to the Hebrews,* presumably because of its tone of finality — exemplified in

the quotation that is the subject matter of this Chapter. However, by the fourth century, the arguments had faded away, and Epistle to the Hebrews was accepted as Holy Scripture.

Another point to note was that the Epistle was directed at wavering *Jewish* Christians who were, because of persecution, tempted to fall back into Judaism. The aim was to encourage them to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Because of the situation, the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* repeatedly tried to emphasize the superiority of the teachings of Christ over the Old Testament. In such circumstances, we can understand why the author might have felt that he should warn them that there was no second chance. For, in the face of serious persecutions, it was easy to give up and to hope that one would be more successful in another earth-life.

Indeed, some people who discourage the teaching of reincarnation do so because they know that human beings tend to postpone making changes for the better. They procrastinate; leave it until "tomorrow", whenever it is a matter of dropping bad habits or developing good ones. If people believe that they have another opportunity to come to the world again, it is feared that they might not strive to do the Will of the Almighty as hard as they would if they were warned that it is "appointed unto men once to die, and after that comes judgment."

But this assumption would be valid only if people are given inadequate and partial information. If they know, as is the case, that all men on earth today have already been on earth many times before, that everyone was privileged more than once before to listen to the teachings from God through His prophets or His Son, their attitudes would be different. If in addition to this, they have the knowledge of the End Time, if they know how it is that, as John the Baptist warned, "The Kingdom of God is at hand", then they would realize that they have no time to waste. And, if they are convinced that one reaps what one sows, they would appreciate the absolute necessity of striving to live aright at all times. We return to a fuller discussion of these issues in later Chapters.

Furthermore, let us consider what people have in mind when they quote the Hebrew passage: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this

the judgment...” They believe that at physical death, a person is immediately judged. And having been judged, there is no question of a return to the earth and, therefore, no possibility of dying a second time. We have already shown, in Chapter 5, that this point of view leads to ridiculous conclusions, including casting serious doubts on the perfect Justice and Love of the Creator. We do not need to add anything to the explanations of Chapter 5 to show that it is wrong to use the Hebrews statement as an argument against reincarnation.

Some Died More than Once

However, let us note that the statement “it is appointed unto men once to die” should not be interpreted in a simplistic and superficial manner. There are accounts in the Bible of people who died but were subsequently raised from the dead. If one were to take the Hebrew passage literally, one would have to deny such miracles. For, a person raised from the dead must necessarily die a second time. We will here review briefly miracles in which the dead were raised because the accounts of these miracles provide further insights into the nature of the human being and the process of dying and thereby lead to a clearer understanding of what reincarnation is.

Let us recall those persons that were raised from the dead by Jesus Christ. There is the account of raising from the dead the young man of Nain, the only son of a widow (Luke 7:11-18). Did this young man live forever after? In other words, is he still living until today? Obviously, he must have physically died again; that is, a *second* time.

There was also another only child, the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, who was confirmed to have died but whom Jesus Christ raised up (Luke 8:41-56). The passage is quite vivid and highly instructive:

> But taking her by the hand, he called, saying, “Child, arise”. *And her spirit returned*, and she got up at once; and he directed that something be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed; *but he charged them to tell no one what had happened* (Luke 8:54-56). (All italics mine).

Again, the daughter of Jairus must have died subsequently, that is, for the second time. And this passage does, in fact, teach us an important lesson. The

lesson is that when a person dies on earth, what really has happened is that the spirit has abandoned or discarded the physical body. As we stated in Chapter 2, the real person is spirit, the body is only the garment or the cloak. Just as an old or torn coat may be discarded, so does the spirit abandon a physical body that, for one reason or another, is no longer suitable.

Thus, the process of raising a dead body involves making the spirit repossess the body it had earlier discarded. It can do so under certain circumstances and as long as the body has not been so badly damaged as to be unusable by the spirit. To use a simplified analogy: a child takes off his coat and throws it away; but his father makes a timely appearance and commands the child to take the same coat and wear it again. In the miracle of raising the dead, Jesus Christ as the father commands the spirit (the daughter of Jairus) to take up the coat (her body) and wear it again. The Divine Power radiating from Christ ensures that the command is obeyed, "*And her spirit returned*". It is the same Power that had cured the woman who had been suffering from a blood disease ("issue of blood") for twelve years (Luke 8:43 - 48).

Jesus "charged them to tell no one what had happened" (Luke 8:56). Why did He not want them to tell anybody? He did not advise secrecy when He raised the young man of Nain, nor in the case of Lazarus. It is reported, in the case of Lazarus, that "some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." The charge was, thus, not a general one but was specific to that audience.

Jesus made other statements that were intended for particular persons and not for everybody. For example, he told the rich young ruler who had asked what he should do to inherit eternal life: "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Luke 18:22). This statement is misunderstood by certain Christians to mean that everybody who wishes to live aright should do away with riches. But this is a statement addressed to this particular young ruler and those of his kind whose earthly possessions have become obstacles to their spiritual development.

There are many rich people who use their wealth to serve the Will of the Almighty on earth. Their earthly riches become only tools in the service of the Lord. To paraphrase the words of a Christian hymn: Riches, like all good

things around us, are sent from heaven above; for which we should thank the Lord. To spread the Word of the Lord, to build places of worship, and so on, “riches” are required. Why would such necessary riches be reserved only for those who do not believe in God? The advice to the rich young man was not a universal precept. Moreover, to follow Christ means nothing else than to live strictly in accordance with His Teachings in all our activities, including in our chosen professions and in all our relationships.

Let’s consider why Jesus asked the audience not to tell anybody about the raising of the daughter of Jairus. We do not know. But is it possible that, in this instance, Jesus sensed that those who might hear the story might scorn and scoff in disbelief and thereby burden themselves with guilt? Unfortunately, don't people all too often deride what they do not understand, such as reincarnation? And it is probably for similar reasons that we are admonished:

> Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot, and turn to attack you (Matthew 7:6).

The Silver Cord

At this point, I will digress to give a helpful hint. The soul (that is, the spirit without the physical body) is connected to the physical body by means of what is called “the silver cord”. As long as the silver cord is not broken, the spirit is able to re-possess the body. The silver cord is not visible to the eyes of our physical body but it can be seen and has, indeed, been seen by some clairvoyants.

The author of *Ecclesiastes* (or *The Preacher*) in the Old Testament, who is thought to be, or at least associated with the proverbially wise Solomon, uses the expression “silver cord” in describing the last days of a dying man. He admonishes men to think of the Creator while they are still young. One should not wait until the last minute before turning to the Creator. *The Preacher* exhorts us to remember the Creator before death comes, and the silver cord is cut (“before the silver cord is snapped”... *Ecclesiastes* 12:6). This reminds us of the habit of some people, including some famous ones, who request baptism only on their death-beds. Among such people are some

who had publicized their atheism before death approached.

Even though the vast majority of us do not see the silver cord, it is not really anything that strange. The umbilical cord arises from the navel and connects the foetus (the unborn baby) to the placenta in the mother's womb. At birth, the umbilical cord is cut and the baby is set free. The point at which the cut is made heals and becomes the navel. The silver cord, in linking the physical body with the soul, performs a role similar to that of the umbilical cord. Just as cutting the umbilical cord sets the baby free from the womb, so also breaking the silver cord permits the soul to free itself completely from the physical body and to continue its journey in another world. *Death on earth is like birth into the Beyond.*

Spiritual impressions pass through the silver cord to the solar plexus (situated below the diaphragm) and from there to the back brain (also called the small brain). From the back brain such impressions go to the frontal (or large) brain which processes them so that they become accessible to our various physical senses. The experiences of the physical world reach the spirit through the same channel. They start from the frontal brain through the back brain, the solar plexus, and the silver cord and finally reach the spirit.

As a further hint, it should be remarked that one of the first difficulties that confront materialists and those who do not believe in life after death is that, at the point of death, their silver cords are thick and do not break away from the body for a long time. The result is that dying is tortuous and long. In some cases, the soul remains connected long enough to watch its own body decay and it feels the pain.

After this digression, let us consider a third miracle of bringing the physically dead back to life. Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha, had been dead for four days before he was raised from the dead. Going by some people's interpretation of the Hebrews passage, Lazarus would have been judged and there would be no question of his being raised up. If it were true, in a purely literal and simplistic sense, that "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment", Lazarus would be alive today and stay alive until the Day of Judgment. But, it is safe to assume that Lazarus, in fact, died again — a second time.

Avoid Superficiality

The point we are making about the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews is that it should not be considered superficially. Nor should any Bible passage for that matter. We have recalled three instances in which Jesus raised people from the dead; such people would have died, or must have died, a second time. We may also recall that Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath. These raised persons could not have remained on earth in the same bodies ever since. This means that there is much more to the passage.

Some people might argue that all the examples given are miracles by Jesus, the Son of God, or by Elijah, a Prophet. In other words, they would argue that these are special cases that should not "count." Such an argument would be invalid. The study of death and the dying (a field of investigation called thanatology) has aroused increased and considerable interest. Some of those engaged in this new field of study have reported cases of people who had been declared clinically dead but who somehow subsequently returned to earthly existence. Foremost among the researchers who have reported and published such cases are two American doctors, Raymond Moody, Jr. and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Indeed, *On Death and Dying* (1969) by Kubler-Ross, and *Life after Life* (Bantam, 1976) by Moody were both best-selling titles in North America. This means that in recent times there were on earth people who were once declared dead in accordance with standard medical criteria. They had, in effect, "risen" from the dead; they resurrected! It is safe to assume that such people would have died or will die again — a second time!

It is true that physical bodies that are raised from the dead, and therefore die the second time, are not a significant proportion of the total human population. The normal situation is for a *physical body* to die only once. That a *physical body* normally dies only once is so obvious as not to warrant any statement. But as noted in the beginning of this Chapter, the theme of which the quotation is a part is not about whether or not a person can return to the earth in a new physical body. No, the author of Hebrews did not intend to take, and was not taking a position on reincarnation.

In what sense can we say that human beings, in the sense of human spirits, die only once? We have said, and perhaps most Christians can readily accept,

that the human being is spirit. The spirit, the innermost core of man, can die. Being the innermost core, the real man, it is understandable that once the spirit dies, the journey is finished, it is all over. There is nothing left to die. And so, the death of the spirit is the final death, eternal death, everlasting damnation. The spirit can die only once. It is only in this sense of dying that we should interpret Hebrews 9:27, and similar statements in the Scriptures.

Thus, for example, when Jesus is quoted as saying “And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:26), it is not the physical body of the believer that will not die but rather the spirit. For, are there not persons during the last 2,000 years who lived and believed in Jesus and yet have died in a physical sense? Of course, there are many, including great ones like Peter the Disciple of Jesus, John (“the Disciple whom Jesus loved”) and Apostle Paul.

As discussed in Chapter 3, reincarnation does not mean that the same physical body lives again and again. On the contrary, the correct teaching of reincarnation affirms that the physical body is only a cloak for the real person. The death of the physical body does not, therefore, mean the death of the person. A person sheds this cloak in a process called death but may return to the earth again in a fresh cloak; that is, as a newborn baby with a new physical body. It is the spirit, not the physical body, which is judged. Reincarnation means that the same spirit comes into the world more than once; for each earth-life, it requires a new physical body. This implies that a particular spirit experiences the death of many of its physical bodies; just like each of us in this one earth-life, most likely has used and discarded many clothes. For, the body is only the garment of the spirit. However, this garment deserves the greatest care to ensure that it is the valuable tool for the spirit as intended by the Creator.

Chapter 7. Bible Accounts that Suggest Reincarnation

He who makes no effort to grasp the Word of the Lord aright burdens himself with guilt! ("In "The Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Volume I, p. (5))

To believe without understanding is just indolence, mental laziness! It does not lead the spirit upwards, but presses it down. Look upward, therefore, we are to test and investigate. Not for nothing does the urge to do so lie within us.
("In The Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Volume I, Lecture "Awake!")

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No amount of logical arguments would be adequate to convince some Christians of the truth of reincarnation. Nor would the accounts of the personal experiences of other people persuade some Christians. Even though it is quite obvious that without reincarnation one cannot argue convincingly of the perfect Justice of God, many Christians would still want to know what the Scriptures say about reincarnation. They would ask: Does the Bible support it? What did the earliest followers of Christ think of it? The latter question has already been answered in part in Chapter 4.

I endeavour to show in this Chapter that there is support in the Bible for reincarnation and that belief in reincarnation was widespread in Biblical times and was taken for granted by many. As will be shown later in this Chapter and in the next, the Lord Jesus Christ was certainly a believer in reincarnation. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.), who was born only a few years after the Crucifixion of Jesus, wrote that of the three philosophical sects among the Jews (the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees) the Sadducees believed that souls die with their bodies (a belief which runs counter to Christian faith) but that both the Pharisees and the Essenes believed in rebirth (reincarnation). The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered

in 1947 and presumed to be part of the library of the monastery of the Essenes, show that the Essenes believed in the pre-existence of the soul (a necessary requirement for reincarnation) and would, therefore, seem to confirm the claim of the historian Josephus that the Essenes believed in reincarnation.

Some Truths Are Not in the Bible

Before discussing specific passages in the Bible that are suggestive of reincarnation, let me remark that it is wrong to assume that all truths are to be found in the Scriptures. It is simply not so. Truths are revealed to humankind according to humanity's state of spiritual maturity; that is, revelation is progressive. Some truths may not have been given at some particular point in time because the people were not yet ready for such truths. Even the way a particular truth is presented depends on how mature the audience is perceived to be. We find that this makes sense in our educational system; why should it not make sense in the school of spiritual life?

When a child has finished drinking his bottle of Coke, we may tell him that the bottle is empty. He will agree, and this is true for his age. But we may tell an older child that the bottle is not really empty, that nature does not permit a vacuum. The bottle is full of air. And again, this is true. And we can go on to tell a yet more mature person that the empty bottle contains more than one item; that it contains a mixture of many gases including nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide. It is in a similar manner that spiritual truths have been revealed to humankind over millennia.

It was the same with the mission of Christ. He spoke explicitly only of the most urgent things that people of His time needed to know to enable them make spiritual progress. He did not teach all there was to know. And so Paul could say:

> For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully ... (1 Corinthians 13: 9 - 12).

It should, therefore, be clear that the fact that an idea is not in the Bible, does not mean that the idea is false. That is, some truths are not in the Scriptures. In this connection, let it be noted that the Trinity is not a concept that is mentioned explicitly in the Bible. Indeed, the only direct mention is one single verse in the *First Epistle of John:*

> For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one (1 John 5:7). (Authorized King James Version).

But even this verse is known to biblical scholars to be a very late interpolation (addition) and is sometimes omitted from modern translations of the New Testament. In other words, a direct mention of the Trinity is technically non-existent in the Bible. The Revised Standard Version, for example, states: "There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree." The New Jerusalem Bible presents the same passage thus: "So there are three witnesses, the Spirit, water and blood; and the three of them coincide." It is almost far-fetched to consider these as a reference to the concept of the Holy Trinity.

Matthew reported that Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and teach all nations, baptizing them "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). But this quotation does not necessarily imply that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one. Despite the slimness of the evidence in the Bible, the Trinity has come to be accepted as central to Christian belief about the nature of God. And, of course, the Trinity is a correct teaching and a definite reality, although the concept is often misunderstood and wrongly taught.

Moreover, the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed are said every Sunday in churches around the world and they represent an important part of the common profession of faith of Christians. But these formulations of faith are not found in the Bible; they cannot be said to be in the Scriptures. The Nicene Creed had its origin in a theological dispute called the Arian controversy in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. It was first formulated in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea and reached its near final form at the Council of

Chalcedon in 351 A.D. In other words, what would constitute Christian beliefs were decided by conferences of bishops.

The point made above is that we are not at all justified to think that all important spiritual or even Christian concepts must be found in the Bible. It would, therefore, not matter even if reincarnation were not mentioned in the Bible. Reincarnation, however, is one truth for which there are supporting and suggestive passages in the Bible.

Different Bibles

Furthermore, in thinking about Biblical authority, we should be mindful of the history of how the books that now constitute the Bible were decided upon as well as the fact that even today the Bible means different things to different Christians. The Protestant Bible has fewer books than the Roman Catholic Bible. Thus, the Jerusalem Bible has as part of the Old Testament the following books which are *not* included in the King James Version (and other Protestant Versions) of the Bible: Tobit, Judith, 1st and 2nd Maccabees, The Book of Wisdom (also called the Wisdom of Solomon), Ecclesiasticus (also called the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach), and Baruch. These seven additions are called Deuterocanonical Books.

The Greek Orthodox Church's Bible has in addition to the Roman Catholic Bible the following: 1 Esdras, Psalm 151 (note that the last Psalm in the Roman Catholic and Protestant Bibles is Psalm 150), the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees. Another book, 4 Maccabees, is added in an appendix. Slavonic Bibles approved by the Russian Orthodox Church have in addition to the Catholic Bible 1 and 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, and 3 Maccabees. Eleven other books together with the Deuterocanonical Books form the Apocrypha. The full Apocrypha is normally available as a separate publication from the Bible but it is included in some interfaith versions of the Bible, such as the Expanded Edition of the Revised Standard Version published by Oxford University Press.

The point is that the books which constitute the Bible for the Protestant Churches are different from those of the Catholic Church and are in turn different from those of the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches. Moreover, for the same book, there may be differences on account of the different

original sources (manuscripts) used for the translations from ancient into modern languages. With these clarifications in mind, let us proceed to examine the pieces of evidence of reincarnation in the Bible.

Pre-Existence of the Soul

The Book of Wisdom also called The Wisdom of Solomon, which, as stated above, is one of the Deuterocanonical Books included in Roman Catholic, Greek, and Russian Orthodox Versions of the Bible but not in the Protestant Versions, has a passage (8:19-20) suggestive of reincarnation. The passage indicates that human souls already exist and are active before they inhabit physical bodies on earth. Below are two Biblical versions of the passage:

> I was a boy of happy disposition,
> I had received a good soul as my lot,
> Or rather, being good, I had entered an undefiled body.
> (*The New Jerusalem Bible*)

> As a child I was by nature well endowed
> And a good soul fell to my lot;
> Or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body.
> (From the Expanded Edition of *The Revised Standard Version* published by Oxford University Press)

The passage may be interpreted as stating that a good soul is rewarded with an *undefiled* body; presumably a bad soul would deserve a defiled body. In other words, the soul had existed before its earthly birth and had acted in such a way that it earned an "undefiled body."

In narrating his call to prophethood, Jeremiah stated:

> Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "*Before* I formed you in the womb, I knew you; and *before* you were born I consecrated you, and I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:4-5; italics added).

This passage clearly suggests that Jeremiah existed in a non-earthly part of Creation before he was conceived. This is to say that pre-existence is

acknowledged by the Scriptures and that human beings do not come into existence only at birth. If we existed before birth, does that period of existence include, or can it include, a prior time on earth? Why not? This idea of pre-existence, which suggests the possibility of reincarnation, is again presented in the Gospel According to St. John in a manner similar to that of Jeremiah:

> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John (John 1:6).

The statement suggests that John already existed somewhere, from where he was sent by God to the earth. In other words, John was already living as a man in a non-earthly part of Creation before God sent him on an errand to the earth. That is, his birth was not the beginning of his existence. Logically, part of that prior existence could have been spent on earth. In his comments on this passage, Origen (who, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, was "the most prominent of all the Church Fathers with the possible exception of Augustine") wrote: "And if the Catholic opinion holds good concerning the soul, as not propagated with the body, but existing previously and for various reasons clothed in flesh and blood this expression, *'sent from God'*, will no longer seem extraordinary as applied to John."

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also provides support for the idea of pre-existence of the individual soul. Here, in two Versions of the Bible, is what he wrote (*Ephesians 1:3-4*):

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*
> *He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*
> (Revised Standard Version, italics added)

> Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. *Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love,*

> *Marking us out for himself beforehand, to be adopted sons, through Jesus Christ.*
> (The New Jerusalem Bible, italics added)

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (9:10-13) referred to the story of Esau and Jacob, the twin children of Isaac and Rebecca. It is a story of intrigue and deception by Jacob aided by his mother. While the twins were still in the mother's womb, God reportedly said to Rebecca:

> Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger (Genesis 25:23).

The Prophet Malachi (1: 2-3) paraphrased the above passage in stark terms:

> Is not Esau Jacob's brother?, says the Lord.
> Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau;
> I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.

Why the apparent injustice to Esau and the favoritism showered upon Jacob, despite his subsequent acts of deception? Is God misquoted or could He be arbitrary and unjust? The story of Esau and Jacob would make sense only if the souls of the twin brothers had existed previously during which period they lived in such different ways to deserve different fates on earth this time around. Otherwise, our conception of a God of perfect Justice and Love is called into question. In other words, to make sense of the story of Esau and Jacob without committing blasphemy, one must admit the truth of the pre-existence of the soul and of the immutable law that "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Further reference will be made to the story of Jacob and Esau in Chapter 8.

The Case of Prophet Elijah

In the last book of the Old Testament, the following promise is made:

> Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes (Malachi 4:5).

It is not clear whether the “great and terrible day of the Lord” refers to the coming of Jesus Christ or to the period of the Last Judgment in which we now stand. Whatever it signifies, the prophecy of Malachi is clear. It is that Elijah, the great prophet who “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” would come again about 500 years later, if by the “day of the Lord” the coming of Christ was meant. If the period of the Last or World Judgment was intended, it would mean that the rebirth of Elijah was being predicted 2,500 years into the future. Here we find a clear indication of the fact of reincarnation.

Some people may, however, imagine that Elijah did not die and that he was to return to the earth in the same physical body in which he “went up by a whirlwind into heaven”, borne on “a chariot of fire, and horses of fire” (2 Kings 2:11). This would mean that he would return to the earth in the same body at the time of Christ 500 years after he was carried away. Or, even more fantastic, about 2,500 years later, if the time of the World Judgment was meant. That would not be a reasonable thought. The Bible does report that 50 men were sent to look for him following his disappearance. They spent three days searching mountains and valleys but did not find him. While it is true that his body was not found, we cannot conclude that he did not die. His body could have been deposited at a point inaccessible to the search party.

The interpretation of the event that accords with the Laws of Creation would be to presume that the prophet died in a mishap witnessed only by Elisha (his follower and successor) but his body could not be located by a search party that was later organized. Malachi, who lived 400 years after the disappearance of Elijah, conveyed the promise that Elijah would be sent to the world again. We should note that the Jewish people in the time of Jesus Christ interpreted the prophecy of the coming again of Elijah in the sense of a reincarnation. He would be born as a baby. It was for this reason that some of them thought, erroneously, that Jesus was a rebirth of Elijah:

> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:14).

Let it be stressed, however, that this is not to suggest that Elisha was claiming to see what he did not see. Not at all. Indeed, Elisha might have seen with his

nonphysical eyes the departing soul of the physically dead Elijah. In other words, Elijah might have died (in a physical sense) in a mishap and in accordance with the Law of Spiritual Gravity, his soul, being pure and light, was lifted up into higher realms. Elisha might momentarily have been granted the ability to watch this event with his inner eyes. But the event was later misunderstood as a purely earthly, physical happening.

The Man Born Blind

Let us now move on to some New Testament passages relevant to reincarnation. I will first discuss the account of the healing of the man who was blind from birth (John, Chapter 9). The blind man, it would appear, often sat by the roadside begging. As Jesus and his disciples passed by him, a question agitated the minds of the disciples. And so they asked:

> Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? (John 9:2).

We should reflect carefully on this question because of its importance in the context of our discussion of reincarnation.

The question indicates that the disciples believed, or knew, that it was possible for a baby to be born blind as a result of the baby's sin. The disciples were, of course, intelligent and wise enough to know that if a baby were to be punished for its sin by being born blind, such a sin could only have been committed *before* birth. In other words, the disciples would not have asked the question if they did not consider it possible for a person to commit a sin *before birth* in the current earth-life. If a person must be made to suffer on earth for a wrong done before birth, such wrong could have been done on earth in a previous earth-life. Thus, the question the disciples asked our Lord Jesus Christ implied that they believed in reincarnation. It should be emphasized that the answer Jesus gave does *not* in any way contradict a belief in reincarnation. Jesus is quoted as saying:

> It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him (John 9:3).

What this means is that *in this particular case*, the cause of blindness was due

neither to the sin of the man nor to that of his parents. Christ's answer should not be interpreted to mean that there are no cases in which adversity or infirmity is due to a man's own sin.

And there are cases of birth defects that are caused by the bad habits, carelessness, or ignorance of the parents. One may recall the case of thalidomide, a sedative and hypnotic drug that caused serious malformations in infants born to mothers who had used the drug during pregnancy. Certainly, no well-meaning Christian would imagine that all those "thalidomide babies" were born so that in them "the works of God might be made manifest."

Let us further note that if the disciples were wrong in believing that one could be born blind because of one's sin, Jesus would have told them so. He was ever so ready to teach them and to help them do away with wrong concepts. The two possible causes suggested by the disciples for the man's blindness were wrong in this particular case. But this fact does not mean that, in other cases, these two possibilities might not be valid. Therefore, they were not wrong in their basic reasoning. And so Jesus did not rebuke them.

What are we to make of the explanation that Jesus gave? Of the fact that the man was born blind so "that the works of God might be made manifest in him"? In Chapter 6, we cited the story of the rich young man as an example of wrong generalizations of Christ's statements. We must again warn against the tendency of some Christians to generalize statements that apply only to specific cases. Unfortunately, many Christians today imagine that the explanation Jesus gave in respect of the man born blind applies to all cases of sick people. Such thought is a dishonor to the Teachings of Christ.

To appreciate the explanation Jesus gave for this particular case, we must understand the concept of "Mission Karma." Mission Karma is a fate, a consequence, a sacrifice that a person voluntarily accepts in order to fulfill a particular mission. A man is drowning in a swimming pool; I notice it, and even though I am fully dressed, I jump into the pool to try to save him. By my action, I have accepted voluntarily a number of consequences. First, my clothes will be wet and I will have to change afterwards. If the clothes are such that they should never go into water, I run the risk of ruining them.

Second, I accept the risk of being drowned myself, depending on how I handle the drowning man. These possible consequences of my action would constitute the "mission karma" that might be associated with my mission of mercy. Similarly, suppose a house is burning and I enter it to save a child trapped in it. By undertaking the mission, I accept voluntarily the possibility, indeed the likelihood, of being burnt. Any burns I receive are the associated mission karma.

In Chapter 9, we will discuss the Law of Sowing and Reaping, which is also called the Law of Karma. The idea of mission karma helps to deepen further our understanding of the working of this Law. Mission karma explains, for example, how it was possible for Jesus Christ to be murdered even though He obviously and definitely was sinless. That is, the murder was *not* the fruit of His sowing.

Even before Jesus set out on His mission of salvation, it was appreciated that Darkness had descended heavily on earth, that men had become exceedingly evil and confused, that even their religious leaders sought only earthly power and influence and were no longer interested in the truth. It was, therefore, clear that earthmen could reject His teachings and might even kill Him. Because Jesus was, and is the personification of Love, He accepted the risk, in the manner that the man, who out of love, dashed into the burning house to save a trapped child accepted the risk of being burnt.

It should, of course, be easy to understand that the man who voluntarily, and out of genuine love, accepts a mission that is associated with dangers is at the same time sowing good seeds, seeds of pure love. The seeds will grow, mature and, in due course, yield a bountiful harvest. Such harvests arising from acts of selfless love are the treasures we store for ourselves in heaven; they form points of anchor for the invisible threads that pull us to Paradise.

We are now in a position to understand the real significance of what Christ meant when he said that the man was born blind "that the works of God might be made manifest in him." The man might have been one of those in the Beyond who requested God to permit them to be on earth during the time of Jesus Christ and to contribute something, however little, to the success of the Mission of Jesus Christ. The requests of many human spirits, presumably

including this man born blind, were granted. Thus, the man voluntarily accepted the burden of being born blind as his way of helping the Mission of Christ. And it came to pass, that at the time of his own fulfillment, the man crossed the path of Jesus and provided an opportunity for a spectacular miracle. Jesus asked the blind man to "go and wash in the Pool of Siloam." The fact that "Siloam" means "one who has been sent" is perhaps confirmation that the mission karma explanation is correct — the man had been sent (preordained) to play a role in the mission of Jesus.

That this healing was a very important event is shown by the fact that all the 41 verses of Chapter 9 of the Gospel according to St. John are devoted to it. The miracle was seen as strong evidence of the Divine Mission of Jesus:

> Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man that was born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing (John 9:32-33).

The Pharisees, who claimed to be disciples of Moses, were determined to see that Jesus Christ was not accepted by the masses. They said: "God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man (Jesus) we do not know where he comes from" (John 9:29). They must have considered the miracle a major setback for them. They went to the parents of the formerly blind man and also confronted the man directly hoping that the parents and the man would deny the cure.

Such were the courage and conviction of the man that he refused to budge but asserted the fact of his cure, even though he faced the certainty of being excommunicated (put out of the synagogue). The Pharisees did, in fact, cast him out. Jesus later met and spoke with him. So clear and strong was the cured man's spiritual insight that he immediately believed and worshipped Jesus. He must, indeed, have been a noble spirit, worthy of being permitted to render service to the Lord.

Let me summarize the key lessons of the story of the healing of the man born blind. First, it provided an opportunity for the disciples to indicate their belief in reincarnation. As we shall see, they expressed this same belief that was prevalent in their time on other occasions. The belief could not have been

wrong; if it was, Jesus would have told them so. The story also provides a probable example of mission karma and permits us to extend our knowledge of the Law of Sowing and Reaping.

John the Baptist

Both Matthew (11:1-15) and Luke (7:19-28) report what Jesus thought of John the Baptist. John the Baptist heard, while in prison, about the activities of Jesus. He sent two of his own disciples to go and find out if Jesus was indeed the one "who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3; Luke 7:20).

Many thoughtful readers of the Bible would probably have wondered about this errand. Why would John the Baptist send people to find out for him who Jesus was? John had baptized Jesus at the River Jordan before Jesus started on His Mission. Matthew's account of that occasion suggests that John the Baptist recognized Jesus, that he knew who Jesus was, as the following passage indicates:

> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented (Matthew 3: 13 - 15).

It should be noted that Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus contains nothing to indicate whether or not John the Baptist recognized Jesus (Mark l:9-12). Was Matthew in error in reporting that John the Baptist knew exactly who Jesus was at the time he baptized Him? If John the Baptist recognized Jesus at the time of the baptism, what follow-up actions did he take? Had he forgotten about the event by the time he sent his followers, or had his faith wavered in prison? Obviously his faith could not have wavered; for his courage and the strength of his conviction were exceedingly great. And we have it on Christ's authority that he was much more than a prophet and that "among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Is it possible that the disciples of John the Baptist misrepresented his message or that the story was perhaps misreported? These considerations are somewhat of a digression, since they do not touch on the

issue of reincarnation — the subject matter of this book.

What is of great relevance to reincarnation is a statement of Jesus recorded by Matthew in the account of this incident:

> And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 11:14-15, The Revised Standard Version).
>
> And he, if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return. Anyone who has ears should listen! (Matthew 11:14-15, The New Jerusalem Bible)
>
> And if you are willing to understand what I mean, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. And if ever you were willing to listen, listen now! (Matthew 11:14-15, *The Living New Testament).*

Here in a clear language, the writer of Matthew says that John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah. As we have already stated, the Jewish people were expecting Elijah to reincarnate "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." It is clear from his Gospel that Matthew firmly believed that the time of Jesus Christ was the "great and terrible day of the Lord." For this reason he could, without any hesitation, ascribe to Jesus the statement that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah.

Please note that John the Baptist was conceived and born as a baby by Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah. He did not appear on the scene as an adult, as would be expected if a mere return of the physical body of Elijah was what was anticipated or happened. By this statement, the author of the Gospel according to Matthew makes two points: first, reincarnation is a fact; second, Elijah reincarnated as John the Baptist.

The first point confirms the fact that belief in reincarnation was widespread at the time of Jesus and was accepted by His disciples. Some Christian sects today believe, on the strength of this passage in Matthew, that John the Baptist was indeed a reincarnation of Elijah. But there is considerable doubt about this. St. Luke's account of the same visit of the disciples of John the

Baptist to Jesus is the same as that of Matthew with one important exception: Luke completely omits the statement that John the Baptist was Elijah.

A statement that appears similar to Matthew's assertion is found in St. Luke's account of the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist. Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a child who would be named John. The Angel described the activity of John the Baptist in the following terms:

> And he will go before him *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17. Italics mine).

One must admit that it is not exactly clear how the phrase "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*" should be interpreted. The Popular Edition of The Jerusalem Bible translates the same expression as "*with the spirit and power of Elijah*', which is not any clearer. The phrase could be interpreted to mean that the spirit of Elijah and the spirit of John the Baptist would be one and the same. This would agree with Matthew's view that John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah.

But the same phrase could also be interpreted differently to indicate simply that John the Baptist would carry out his mission in a manner closely similar to that of Prophet Elijah. In support of this interpretation is the text of the *Living Bible* for Luke 1:17, which reads: "He will be a man of rugged spirit and power like Elijah, the prophet of old; and he will precede the coming of the Messiah, preparing the people for his arrival." A further argument in favor of this latter interpretation is found in John 1:21. On one occasion, priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist who he was. He told them that he was not the Christ.

> And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not (John 1:21).

John the Baptist was also reported to have said that he was not the prophet whom God promised (in Deuteronomy 18:15) to raise among the Levites. He

said he was the one of whom Isaiah said: “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.” It would, therefore, appear that while Matthew was right in his underlying belief in reincarnation, his specific claim that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah might not be correct.

This does not in any way weaken the case for reincarnation. One can be correct on a general point and yet be wrong on a specific point. The error on the specific does not imply an error in the general. Let us illustrate. A man on a flight from Canada to the United States of America lands at an international airport in New York. He had always heard about John F. Kennedy Airport and so he writes on a postcard to be mailed to a friend back home stating that his plane was about to land in the New York area at the John F. Kennedy Airport. On alighting from the plane, he notices that he is, in fact, at the La Guardia Airport. It just happens that flights from Canada to the New York metropolis have a choice of airports. The gentleman is wrong about the airport but this does not affect the correctness of his statement that he had arrived in the New York area.

Let us note that the priests and Levites specifically asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah. The question again implies that the priests and Levites believed in reincarnation. Otherwise, they would not think that John the Baptist might be Elijah. And it was not necessary for them to ask if John the Baptist was working in a manner similar to Elijah; they themselves could tell whether or not this was the case. In other words, the priests and Levites interpreted the phrase “*in the spirit and power of Elijah”* in the sense of reincarnation.

The Transfiguration

The name of Elijah comes up again in the accounts of the Transfiguration as recorded by Matthew (17:1-13) and by Mark (9:1-13). Jesus had gone up to a high mountain in the company of three disciples — Peter, James, and John. While there, the disciples witnessed a deeply moving spiritual spectacle that has come to be known as the Transfiguration. The countenance of Jesus changed. “And His garments became glistening, intensely white … And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking to Jesus.” (Mark 9:3 - 5).

A cloud overshadowed them and a voice out of the cloud declared: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). For the disciples, the event was further confirmation that their Master was indeed the Son of God. But they also remembered the teaching of the Scribes (presumably based on the prophecy recorded in Malachi 4:5) that Elijah must come before the Messiah. Hence, they sought clarification from Jesus. They asked “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” In answer, Jesus is reported to have said:

> But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased (Matthew 17:12).
>
> But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him (Mark 9:13).

The two statements are substantially the same. And they show Jesus as confirming the truth of the prophecy that Elijah would reincarnate, and stating that Elijah had already reincarnated. But Jesus does not reveal the identity of the reincarnated Elijah.

Matthew goes on to add a statement that is not in Mark: “Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:13). This is a repetition of the view of the author of this Gospel that John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah (Matthew 11: 14 15). Matthew gives the impression here that this view was also held by the three disciples — Peter, James, and John — who were in the company of Jesus on the occasion of the Transfiguration.

I have already noted that this relationship between Elijah and John the Baptist is of doubtful validity. The doubt is based on the declaration by John the Baptist himself that he was not Elijah (John 1:21). However, the response of Jesus can be interpreted as a confirmation that Elijah had reincarnated; but we are not told the identity of his reincarnation.

“Who Do Men Say that I am?”

A question which Jesus posed to his disciples led to an answer that has

become known as Peter's Great Confession, and is recorded in all the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi when He asked them: "Who do men say that I am?" (Mark 8:27).

> And they told him, John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; and others, one of the prophets (Mark 8:28).

It is not Peter's confession that is of interest to us here but rather the above question and the answer. The way the question was framed and the kind of answer the disciples gave indicate an underlying belief in reincarnation. It is reasonable to assume that, at least, some people knew that Jesus was the son of Mary, the wife of Joseph the carpenter. This fact was not one of the answers given by the disciples. It could not have been that all the people were ignorant of this fact, but rather that such an answer would have been inappropriate.

Christ's question was a spiritual one. He was not asking whom the people thought he was in an earthly sense but in a spiritual sense. The disciples understood this, and it was the understanding that led to Peter's Great Confession. But, in the same understanding, they provided the view of ordinary people. These people thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets; a thought that could come only from their belief in reincarnation and their recollection of old prophecies. Jesus was, and is, a part of God and could, therefore, not be the reincarnation of any prophet. This was the key lesson.

But another important lesson for us is the knowledge of how widespread belief in reincarnation was at the time of Jesus Christ. Christ did not need to tell people to accept the idea of reincarnation, because they already did. And if the idea had not been a valid one, Jesus had many opportunities to tell the disciples so. He did not.

Herod Links John the Baptist with Elijah

A further indication of just how widespread the idea of reincarnation was and the expectation that Elijah would reincarnate were the speculations of Herod and the people around him when he first heard about the miracles of Jesus.

Herod was said to be perplexed, and according to Mark, even thought that John the Baptist had resurrected from the dead:

> And he (King Herod) said that John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. Others said that it is Elijah. And others said that it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead (Mark 6:14-16). (Authorized King James Version).

Luke (9:7-9) similarly reports that people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected, or a reincarnation of Elijah or one of the old prophets.

A Revelation Passage

Finally, another Bible passage that strongly suggests reincarnation is found in the message to the Church at Philadelphia as recorded in the Book of Revelation:

> Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and *he shall go no more out* . .. (Revelation 3:12). (Authorized King James Version).

The statement, "he shall go no more out," suggests that the norm, that is the usual expectation, is to go out repeatedly. This repeated going out stops only for those who have overcome, have conquered all sins, have passed the Last Judgment, have attained full spiritual maturity.

In other words, a reasonable interpretation of this *Revelation* passage is in the sense of the cycle of reincarnations, which ends only with the complete maturity of the spirit. Once a spirit has attained to such maturity, he is allotted a place in Paradise and remains there forever. His reincarnations on earth come to an end. He has become one of those who "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

Chapter 8. Reincarnation Clarifies Some Bible Passages

Wherever the "inscrutable ways of God" have to serve as an explanation, there ignorance is unmistakably in evidence!
("In the Light of Truth," The Grail Message, Volume II, Lecture "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!").

For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge... (2 Peter 1:5).

23 23 23
11 11 11

In the last Chapter, we reviewed some passages, which, taken together, suggest that belief in the preexistence of the soul and in reincarnation was widespread at the time of Jesus. Because His disciples and followers as well as the Pharisees and Essenes and, indeed, the generality of Jewish people of that time (especially those of them who had come under the influence of Greek philosophy) believed in reincarnation, Jesus Christ did not need specifically to tell His followers to believe in reincarnation. And some of the disciples' statements recorded in the Bible are suggestive of their belief in reincarnation — for example, when they asked whether a man was born blind because of his sins or those of his parents.

The validity of this conclusion is further confirmed by some passages and at least one story in the Bible, which become understandable and meaningful only when considered in the light of reincarnation. In this Chapter, we will examine the Old Testament story of Jacob and Esau and two Biblical passages. One of the two passages is a statement that Christ is reported to have made, and the other is associated with the second of the Ten Commandments as stated in the Old Testament.

The Story of Jacob and Esau

Jacob and Esau were twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca and grandsons of the Patriarch Abraham. Rebecca had no child after nearly 20 years of marriage to Isaac and was presumed barren. The twins were the answer to Isaac's prayer. As told in the Old Testament, the story of Jacob and Esau is one of the bitterest of sibling rivalries, apparent favoritism, and injustice as well as despicable deception aided and abetted by a doting mother. The story raises many fundamental questions for thinking Christians. But first, let us summarize the story which is told in full in Genesis 25:19-34 and Genesis 27:1-45. Significant references are made to the story by the Prophet Malachi (1:2, 3) and by Apostle Paul (Romans 9:11, 14).

We are told that the struggle of the twins started from the womb and, perplexed by the struggle, the pregnant Rebecca 'took the matter to the Lord.' And the Lord reportedly said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23). Of the twins, Esau with red complexion and hairy body came first and Jacob with smooth body followed, holding Esau's heel. As they grew up, Esau turned out to be an outdoors person and a skilled hunter while Jacob "was a quiet man, dwelling in tents." Esau was beloved by the father "because he ate of his game; but Rebecca loved Jacob."

On one occasion, Esau was starving as he returned from the field. He requested Jacob to give him some of the pottage he was cooking. Jacob decided to take advantage of Esau's starvation and demanded that, in exchange for some pottage, Esau should surrender his birthright — the birthright, in practice, meant leadership of the family and a double share of the inheritance. Esau responded that the birthright was of no use to one dying of starvation as he was. Jacob asked Esau to swear to him that he agreed to give up his birthright and Esau did. (Genesis 25: 29-34).

Incidentally, the tradition in some cultures is that with twins the first one to be delivered is the younger one. The logic is that the younger one comes first only because it is sent on an errand by the older one to find out what things are like outside the womb. This is the case, for example, among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Thus, for the Yorubas, Jacob would be considered the

elder by natural right! But this is a digression.

As Isaac got old and became blind, he sensed that the end of his days was near. He asked Esau to hunt game and use it to prepare his favorite meal so that he might enjoy it and bestow his last blessings on him. Rebecca overheard the conversation and devised a scheme to ensure that Jacob, not Esau, got the father's last blessings. She asked Jacob to get two young goats from the flock so that she might prepare the food the father had requested from Esau. Jacob would then present the food to the father and would pretend that he was Esau. Jacob was at first reluctant fearing that the father might detect the deception as his skin was smooth whereas Esau was very hairy; in that event, Jacob feared that he would get a curse instead of blessing. Rebecca urged Jacob to do as she instructed and that any curse would be on her. She prepared the food, got Esau's best garments for Jacob to wear, and used the goat skins to cover his hands as well as the smooth part of his neck. (Genesis 27:1-17).

Jacob presented the food to Isaac saying, "I am Esau your first-born. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that you may bless me." Isaac was suspicious as he did not expect Esau to find game and prepare the meal so soon. He asked: "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" Jacob answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." Isaac asked him to come close so that he might feel him to know whether or not he was really Esau. Isaac felt Jacob's hands made hairy by the goat skin and said "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Isaac later also perceived the smell of the garments Jacob was wearing (which belonged to Esau) and was successfully deceived into thinking that Jacob was indeed Esau and so he blessed him. Soon after, the real Esau announced his arrival with the food. Isaac trembled violently and explained: "Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing." (Genesis 27:35). Esau remarked bitterly that Jacob had "supplanted" him two times: "He took away my birthright; and behold now he has taken away my blessing." (Genesis 27:36).

Many questions rush into the mind of a thoughtful reader of the story of Esau and Jacob. Is it a fable or a true story? Why were the "two nations in Rebecca's womb" not such as would live in peace and as equals cooperating

with and helping each other, instead of one serving the other? Was it the inevitable outcome of the characters of the two souls or the arbitrary decision of God? And why didn't Rebecca and Isaac pray for a better outcome? Why didn't Isaac simply bless both his twin sons, instead of inviting only one of them to receive his blessings? And why did he need to be cajoled with a special meal? What are we to make of Rebecca as a mother? What lessons is a Christian supposed to draw from this story?

In his reference to the story of Jacob and Esau, the Prophet Malachi wrote: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." Malachi (1:2, 3). What did Esau do to deserve the hatred of God and how did the deceitful Jacob merit the Love of God? Is God, whose primary attribute is Love, capable of hating any person, especially one who has apparently done no wrong?

Rabbis at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. reflected on the story of Jacob and Esau. They were sure that God could not be unjust. Therefore, they thought that the only possible explanation for the different destinies of Jacob and Esau must be that Esau had sinned in the womb! The Rabbis "conjectured that as Rebecca walked past 'houses of idolatry,' Esau indicated his preference by kicking, but 'when she went by synagogues and study-houses, Jacob would kick, trying to get out'."[2] The Rabbis surmised that it was for those actions that God preferred Jacob over Esau and his descendants for generation after generation. The reasoning of the Rabbis seems rather fantastic and far-fetched. It's hard to imagine a foetus committing sin. But they were correct in their recognition that the true God is a God of Justice and that everyone is the architect of his/her fate. Belief in reincarnation would suggest that the different fates of Jacob and Esau would not be arbitrary assignments by God but the results of their actions in previous earth-lives (not actions in the womb).

The Apostle Paul puts the story of Jacob and Esau in a different context and raises a fundamental question about the nature of God. In his Letter to the Romans (9:10-21), he wrote:

> … when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather

> Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, "the elder will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
>
> What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens the heart of whomever He wills.
>
> You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?" But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?" Has the porter no right over the clay, to make out o f the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?"

Paul says that there is no injustice on God's part. But rather than explain how justice is upheld in this story, he seems to be saying that, in God's relations to His creatures, God acts as He pleases and without regard to human conceptions of fairness and justice. God deliberately makes Pharaoh wicked so that he enslaved the Israelis and subjected them to inhuman treatments, for God's own purpose. The same God then turns around to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians with plagues and deaths. Paul's comments also clearly make the case for the idea of predestination. He thinks that the Creator destines some human beings to be good and others to be bad. He predestines some people to be hard-hearted; yet He subjects such people to Judgment and condemns them to suffering, possibly to eternal death.

In these verses, Paul appears to believe that God is simply arbitrary in His actions. In his view, creatures are not entitled to question Him and we should not ask for or expect justice from Him. Paul's metaphor of the porter and the clay seems inappropriate. This is because clay is fundamentally quite different from human creatures that have consciousness and the ability to

reason, to question and to make choices; God gave those abilities to us human creatures to be used for our spiritual and material development.

In his Second Letter to Timothy (2:20-21), Paul hints at a different explanation for the dissimilar fates of people. He wrote: “In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.” Paul is here stating that whether or not one is made into a noble or ignoble vessel depends on one’s own actions — whoever purifies himself can count on being made into a noble vessel and those who fail to purify themselves would be made into ignoble vessels. In other words, the vessel-maker is not arbitrary and is not unjust, contrary to what is implied in his Letter to the Romans (9:10-21).

I should note that most Bible scholars do not believe that Paul is actually the author of the First and Second Letters to Timothy. Such scholars would, therefore, maintain that Second Timothy 2:20-21 do not represent Paul’s position. However, Paul writing to the Galatians stated: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). This is a general principle which would have applied to both Jacob and Esau. Thus, contrary to what Paul says in Romans (9:10-21), their different fates would have been the fruits of their respective past sowings in previous existences.

Less than two centuries after Paul, Origen of Alexandria, acknowledged as the most learned as well as the most original thinker of the early Christian Fathers, commented on the story of Jacob and Esau. He argued that the only explanation for the different fates of Jacob and Esau was that they both had previous existences in which to earn God’s “love” and “hatred”. In his book, *On First Principles,* he wrote that we can believe that God is just only if we believe that Jacob was given preference in the womb as a result of his “merits in some previous life.” Origen was convinced that this explanation applied to all cases of differences in the circumstances of birth.

Jacob and Esau in the Light of Reincarnation

The biblical story of Jacob and Esau becomes clear and unproblematic if interpreted in the light of reincarnation. Both Jacob and Esau had lived before and during those earth-lives "sowed such different seeds" as would yield the different fruits they happened to harvest as twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Their acts of commission and omission in previous existences compelled their different fates. God did not arbitrarily favor Jacob, neither did He hate Esau; each of them was the architect of his own fate. The explanation for the fates of their descendants will become evident as we consider the passage "*Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation..*"

"Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children..."

Let us now consider another Bible passage. In the second of the Ten Commandments given through Moses to the people of Israel (and intended for all human beings) the following statement is recorded:

> For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me* (Exodus 20:5; Italics added).

To think that God can be jealous (in the contemporary sense of the word) seems to me quite a very strange and wrong idea. But the part of the passage that is of particular interest to us here is italicized. The idea that God would visit "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation" must have puzzled millions of thinking Christians. Why would a just God punish children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren for sins they did not commit but which were committed by their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers? One hopes that no Christian would seriously think that God is capable of such grotesque injustice. However, it is not sufficient to refuse to accept the literal meaning; one should go on to search for the spiritual and correct meaning.

First, let us reassure ourselves that God has never punished, and will never punish a person for the sins of others, no matter how closely related such a person might be to the sinner. Nor is it of any avail for one person to accept punishment voluntarily for a sin committed by another person; only the sinner is accountable for his own sin. In another Book of the same Old

Testament, we find the following passage:

> The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

This is a clear statement of the kind of justice with which we can identify the Creator. Another of the many passages that express this same conception of justice that appeals to our Christian morality and common sense is in Deuteronomy:

> The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin (Deuteronomy 24:16).

These two passages appear to be the exact opposite of the concept of "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." Surely, the Lord does not contradict himself. We are left with two possibilities: either the statement is wrong and should be expunged from the Bible or our understanding of it is faulty. Let us assume that the latter is the case, and therefore, that we should endeavor to achieve a greater depth of understanding. So what does "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" mean?

In an age of science, some might imagine that the visiting refers to heredity. That's not the point of the passage. There is no such thing as spiritual heredity; heredity applies only to the physical body. It is true that the wrong habits of parents, the abuses they commit against their own bodies may affect their children adversely. The children of drug addicts, for example, may suffer physical defects, and the children may, therefore, be thought to be suffering from the sins of their addicted parents. A baby born to a mother who has the dreaded AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) may have AIDS. This is not what is meant by "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children."

As will be discussed in Chapter 9, both the Law of Homogeneity and the Law of Sowing and Reaping govern what child is born to what family. A child

born with physical defects caused by the addiction of the mother is not an innocent victim considered from the spiritual standpoint, which is the only valid standpoint in this case. The attraction to the family might be the result of a major weakness that the child shares with the mother; a weakness which, in the mother's case, has manifested in drug addiction. The physical defects acquired by the child might also be the appropriate fruits for seeds sown in an earlier earth-life. Nobody is ever a victim of chance, and nobody suffers for the iniquities of others.

It should be stated, however, that while it is true that children are not the innocent victims of the physical defects arising from the bad habits of or drug abuse by their parents, such parents do not go scot-free. The parents have thereby sown bad seeds that will yield multiple bitter fruits for them to reap sooner or later. In other words, in addition to whatever sufferings the iniquities of parents may inflict on children, the parents themselves also partake of the fruits of such iniquities in full measure.

Consider an example that is sadly common. A father instills into his children the false idea that life does not continue after death; that with death everything is ended. The children accept this viewpoint and adjust their lives accordingly. They also pass this falsehood to their own children, and a series of far-reaching adverse effects is set in motion. While these effects last, the originator of the wrong idea (who may have died physically) cannot make any progress in the Beyond. In the Beyond he recognizes his error and its sad consequences on the earth-lives of his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren etc. These consequences cause him great agony. His own spiritual progress is halted until in one generation of his descendants, the right conception of life after death arises. It is only then that the originator is able gradually to redeem himself from his guilt. The point is that, in every case, the father or mother suffers for his or her own iniquity.

It should also be stressed that every person has the responsibility and duty to reexamine and weigh carefully what he learnt from his parents during his years of childhood. An adult who continues to retain, without question, any ideas and concepts fed to him while he was a child, and adjusts his adult life according to these childhood teachings fully deserves any unsavory consequences. What are retained in adult life should be only those that have

been carefully examined and considered valid. Nobody needs to inherit the ideas, religion, or prejudices of his or her parents. Similarly, we should carefully and seriously examine the traditions and cultures of the societies into which we are born and accept only those that we are convinced are right and sensible.

To appreciate the wisdom and justice that lie in the statement “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” and to resolve any apparent contradictions with other Bible passages, we require the knowledge of reincarnation. Armed with the knowledge that the same human spirits come repeatedly to the earth in other bodies, we can recognize a new conceptual relationship between “fathers” and “children”. It is a relationship in which “father” and “child” are one and the same human spirit. That is, we might speak of Smith who is a reincarnation of Jones as the “child”, and Jones as the “father”. We may even consider earlier periods when Jones had lived as Stone and Wood, respectively. Wood, Stone, Jones and Smith are the same human spirit. They may have changed nationality, race, religion, and even gender, but they are all simply cloaks worn by the same single human spirit in one continuous existence. Thus, it is justice when the iniquities of Wood are visited upon Stone, Jones or Smith.

Therefore, in the sense of reincarnation, we can conceptualize situations in which the sins of the “fathers” are visited upon the “children.” We, ourselves, reap the fruits of the iniquities we committed in one earth-life in subsequent earth-lives. We may also say that the unpleasant experiences we now go through are the fruits of iniquities that we ourselves committed earlier on, in this earth-life or in previous ones. And, conversely, the fortunes that fall on our laps are in fact the fruits of works performed at an earlier period in this earth-life or in previous incarnations.

“Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” is thus seen, through the knowledge of reincarnation, to be in line with our concept of an absolutely just God. The statement expresses the Law of Sowing and Reaping, of Cause and Effect, in the same manner as these Old Testament passages:

> As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble, reap the

same (Job 4:8).

> Great in counsel, and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings (Jeremiah 32:19).

It is in accordance with this Law that many human souls must again return to the earth to make good, to redeem the sins they once committed on earth. This is because earthly beginning stipulates earthly ending by the Law of the Cycle, according to which the ring must close at the place where it began. It was in this knowledge that Goethe, the well-known German after whom the Goethe Institutes around the world are named, could say: “Thus all guilt avenges itself on earth.” In this respect, let us note the Biblical teaching that vengeance belongs to God: “Vengeance is mine and recompense” (Deuteronomy 32:35). It is through the operation of the Law of Sowing and Reaping that God metes out “vengeance” and “recompense” and not through a personal intervention in the lives of individuals.

Generations and the Law of Homogeneity

Although implied in what has already been stated, it is necessary to indicate clearly how the Law of Homogeneity, the Law of Like Attracts Like, may give the appearance that, in a purely earthly sense, the “iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation.”

Take, for example, the case of Mr. Thorn, known to be a really wicked man. In accordance with the Law of Homogeneity, he may attract as children souls in the Beyond that are, like him, wicked. In other words, his children are wicked souls, and are born wicked. For this reason, the children come into the world carrying karma similar to that of their father on account of the similarity of their disposition and past actions. As time goes on, each child’s karma manifests in unhappy experiences of the type that one would associate with Mr. Thorn’s known wicked ways. It could even happen that at the time the children are reaping the fruits of their own wickedness, the fruits of the father’s evil ways are not yet ripe or are not evident, and so he appears to go unpunished. A person who is unfamiliar with Divine Laws and who does not have the knowledge of reincarnation would then erroneously assume that the children were somehow suffering because of their father’s iniquities.

But the fact is that a wicked soul (the father) has attracted similarly wicked souls as children, and these children must undergo experiences which one would associate with a person of their father's wicked disposition. If the children retain their father's wickedness into adulthood, they would also attract wicked souls as their own children (Mr. Thorn's grandchildren) who would be similarly burdened with evil karma. Thus, because of the Law of Homogeneity (the Law of Attraction of Similar Species) the sufferings of Mr. Thorn's children and grandchildren may appear to be due to Mr. Thorn's iniquities. But they would all simply be experiencing similar sufferings on account of having similar personal characters and disposition and for having individually committed similar iniquities at some point in time.

The process is, of course, the same for a man of benevolent and noble nature. He would attract benevolent and noble souls as children who would in turn bring into the world children of similar character. And the benevolence of the father would appear to be passed on from generation to generation. The reality, however, is that the children and grandchildren are simply the beneficiaries of their own nature, their earlier noble thoughts, words, and actions. Any benefits conferred on children by the circumstances of their birth are consequences of the Law of Sowing and Reaping and the Law of Homogeneity.

"There Are Some Standing Here Who will not Taste Death..."

The three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record an occasion on which Jesus told His disciples about His imminent death. He took the opportunity to tell them also about what it took (and takes) to be a good disciple. All three accounts carry a verse, which reported that Jesus stated that some among them would not die until they saw the Kingdom of God come:

> Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Matthew 16:28).
>
> And He said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here, which shall not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1).

> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here, who will not taste death, before they see the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).

How should these verses be interpreted? What is meant by seeing "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" or seeing "the Kingdom of God"? Because the statement was made while Jesus was telling them of His future suffering which was to culminate in crucifixion, some might reason that the verses meant simply that the disciples would witness His death and resurrection. In other words, His crucifixion was not in some distant future, but rather so near that they would be witnesses. But did the crucifixion of Christ mark the coming of the Kingdom of God? Have we been experiencing the Kingdom of God for about the last 2,000 years? I would say no! I would expect that the Kingdom of God would be characterized by genuine, lasting peace, general happiness, joyful activities, and much deeper spiritual understanding and nobler humanity than we have today or have ever had.

We may also note what Luke records in the verse immediately preceding the one quoted above:

> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Luke 9:26).

This verse is obviously a reference to a later period of the Son of Man, the time of the Last Judgment and not to the Crucifixion. Similarly, Matthew's use of the expression "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" suggests a more distant period of the World Judgment, the End-Time, rather than the Crucifixion. Incidentally, the way the above verse in Luke (9:26) is phrased is remarkable, and indicates another critically important piece of knowledge required for our age. In this passage, Jesus addresses the Son of Man in the third person, as another personality. The passage clearly suggests that Jesus Christ regarded the Son of Man as a different personality from Himself. In other words, the Son of God and the Son of Man are different personalities. But we will not address the issue here.

We have confirmation that Jesus was referring to the Last Judgment and not

to the Crucifixion in later Chapters in Matthew (24:34) and in Mark (13:30). The verses, which express the same idea, were words spoken by Jesus in concluding His teachings about the signs and nature of the World Judgment:

> Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away (Matthew 24:34-35).

These verses and those previously quoted state explicitly that some who were on earth 2,000 years ago would not "taste death", would not "pass away", till they witness the events associated with the World Judgment and the coming of the Kingdom of God. To emphasize the point that this was not an idle statement, Christ added that "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35 and Mark 13:31). How then are we to understand this prophecy?

It is understandable that many of the people living at the time of Jesus misunderstood the prophecy as indicating that the Last Judgment and the coming of the Kingdom of God would occur rather soon; they imagined that it was certainly during their own earth-lives. Indeed, many early Christians expected to witness the Second Coming shortly after Christ returned to His Father. We now know that their expectation was not fulfilled and that most of them completely misunderstood the meaning of the statement: "This generation will not pass..." And so, what did Jesus mean?

His statement has deep spiritual meaning; a meaning that becomes clear only in the knowledge of reincarnation. As we all know, many human spirits incarnated among the Jewish people at the time of our Lord Jesus Christ did not accept His teachings. Some even went beyond rejecting His teachings; they mocked, mistreated, or personally persecuted Him. These people would be permitted to incarnate on earth again at the time of the Last Judgment so that they might make their *final* decision for or against the Message of God. In other words, in the perfect Justice and Love of God, those who persecuted Jesus or constituted themselves into obstacles against His Mission would not be condemned outright to eternal death but would be given other chances. They would be allowed to incarnate on earth again and to come across the Message of God yet again. And during the period of the Last Judgment, they

would *have* to make their final decision. Thus, there are people on earth in our time who are reincarnations of people who lived at the time of Jesus Christ. That is, some members of the generation to which Jesus spoke 2,000 years ago are here again. And so, it is really and literally true that that generation of human spirits has not passed away.

Therefore, it is only because reincarnation is a fact, a reality that was, of course, known to Jesus, that He could announce to His followers: "This generation will not pass away, till all these things take place."

Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth, Germany

There is strong objective evidence that reincarnations of some who mocked or reviled Jesus have, in fact, taken place. One runs the risk of trivializing this important subject by discussing specific individuals. But some may well benefit from a consideration of a real, historical example. And so I will outline here the case of Therese Neumann who lived in Konnersreuth, a village in Upper Palatinate, in the northeast of Bavaria, Germany.

She was a reincarnation of one who reviled Jesus Christ while He was on the Crucifixion cross. Born in 1898, Therese Neumann became stigmatized in 1926. Her case was so highly publicized that it is recorded in the *Encyclopedia Britannica.* She was visited by thousands of people from many countries, including American soldiers in the years immediately after World War II.

Therese Neumann bore stigmata, that is, the wound-marks of Jesus Christ, such as the nail marks, the spear wound, as well as the many wounds that the crown of thorns left round His Head. She also had to live through all the physical suffering of Christ, until in the death-throes she sank back exhausted into her blood-drenched bed. For 30 years following her initial stigmatization, she was reported to bleed continually on many Fridays, especially during the last two weeks of Lent. During those episodes, she heard about the Crucifixion in dialects of the language spoken when Jesus was on earth. Her church got involved. In 1927, Therese Neumann was subjected to a fortnight's investigation at the request of her bishop. The interest of the church had to do with the misconception, which still prevails, that stigmatized people are specially blessed people. Indeed, many people who

visited Therese Neumann did so assuming that they were going on a pilgrimage to see a uniquely blessed person. For a period, the bishop issued permits for visits to her.

Therese Neumann died September 18, 1962, but her life and death did not settle what came to be known as the “mystery of Konnersreuth.” First, scientists and medical doctors were puzzled. Soothing ointments and other medications brought about, paradoxically, only painful inflammations that subsided immediately the medical attempts at alleviation were discontinued. Language experts (philologists) were baffled at her apparent understanding of the language of the time of Jesus. There are people who through religious fanaticism or hysteria are able to produce mild cases of stigmata by auto-suggestion. But it was evident that the case of Therese Neumann did not fall into the category of stigmata caused by hysteria.

Again, in the Love of the Almighty, the case of Therese Neumann got the attention of one who knew about her previous incarnations and the real cause of her problems. The requisite spiritual knowledge for the apparent mystery was provided as well as information about what she needed to do to free herself from the terrible karma. Relief and deliverance could come only through recognition of her past grievous sin, followed by a humble plea for forgiveness. But the wrong attitude of her church towards her stigmatization prevented her from taking advantage of the knowledge.

It is sad to note the wrong attitude of many churches toward stigmatized people in general. Stigmatized persons are branded ones who bear a personal guilt toward Jesus; the exceptions are minor cases, which can sometimes come about through auto-suggestion in religious ecstasy. But by the traditions of some churches, these people are revered, and considered as saints. As a result, the stigmatized people are prevented from recognizing their sins and from asking for forgiveness. And so they suffer in vain because of the wrong church tradition, which developed out of ignorance.

Stigmatized people, spontaneously bearing the wound-marks of Jesus, are in dire need of our prayers. They need to be told of their sins, reminded of the true teachings of Jesus, and be informed of the necessity for inner change on their part. In their struggle for spiritual clarity, they need to be protected from

crowds and should be provided the right environment for spiritual contemplation. Recognition, inward change and humble plea for forgiveness would, in all cases, bring about physical relief automatically. And this would be proof that the above explanation for stigmata is the correct one. This would, in turn, also serve as proof of reincarnation. Moreover, it would be a demonstration of what Jesus meant when, referring to the Last Judgment, He said: “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place” (Mark 13:30). Thus, we see how, indeed, reincarnation clarifies Bible passages.

One must add that it is not only those who reviled or mocked Christ, in the manner of the thief on the cross, who have been compelled to reincarnate to atone for the negative roles they played in the Mission of Jesus Christ. Some followers of Jesus, even though they meant well, misrepresented His Message and spread wrong interpretations of Christ’s Message because they did not fully understand Him. Jesus Himself had occasion to lament at the lack of understanding of some of His teachings on the part of even His disciples. Such well-meaning followers have had to reincarnate on earth again to correct the misstatements they made or the falsehoods they had unwittingly spread. Unfortunately, many such errors still persist and, indeed, some of these errors are now considered cornerstones of the doctrines of certain Christian sects.

Moreover, many followers, out of love for the Mission of Christ, have asked to return to help during the period of the Last Judgment. These people are to be found in many parts of the world. A relatively few are consciously fulfilling their callings; many others are playing their pre-ordained roles quite unaware of their own past. The generation that lived in the time of Jesus has, most certainly, not passed away.

Chapter 9. The Laws Governing Creation and Reincarnation

The Divine Laws are true friends in everything, they are helpful blessings from the Will of God, Who thus opens the paths to salvation for everyone who strives towards it. There is not a single other road to this than the one clearly shown by the Laws of God in Creation!

The whole of Creation is the Language of God, which you should earnestly strive to read, and which is by no means as difficult as you may think.

("In The Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Vol. I, Lecture "The Language of the Lord").

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In previous chapters, I have tried to make the case for the compatibility of reincarnation with the teachings of Jesus Christ. I have shown that throughout history, many prominent Christians have believed in reincarnation and I outlined the basis of their belief. I have discussed some conceptions of reincarnation and indicated which ones are wrong and which is the correct one. I stated that one may reincarnate close to the place of one's previous earth-life or far away among a completely different race. I remarked that we have all been on earth before and might be back again. But several questions arise from these. What are the mechanisms that consistently guide reincarnations? Is reincarnation an endless process? If not, how many times must one pass through the earth? Is there a fixed number or is the process flexible? What factors determine when, where, and in what circumstances a human spirit reincarnates? Are there any fresh incarnations on earth? These and other questions on reincarnation will be answered in Chapter 11. In this Chapter, we examine the foundation for answers to the questions. Without such an overarching basis, our answers can only be superficial, and perhaps

difficult to understand.

Creation is Maintained Through God's Laws

The basis for understanding reincarnation, and indeed all life and existence, is the knowledge of the Divine Laws of Creation; Laws which are the manifestations of the Will of God. The Divine Laws may also be called the Laws of Life and they incorporate the Laws of Nature. The Ten Commandments are, of course, in full accord with these laws. The Laws of Creation have always existed and will always exist; hence they are called Eternal Laws. They do not change, cannot be subverted or circumvented by the rich, the powerful, or the clever. They apply equally to all, regardless of circumstances, religion, or beliefs. And they operate not only on earth but also in the Beyond and, indeed, throughout Creation. The effects of these Laws are the same on those who know them as on those who are ignorant of them. Ignorance is no excuse!

For a deeper appreciation of the nature of these Laws, let us contrast them with the laws that men make. Secular laws or the laws of human beings on earth vary from society to society. The Laws of Creation are the same everywhere. Secular laws may be changed at will; what was perfectly legal yesterday may become a criminal act today, and vice versa. The Laws that are the manifestations of the Will of the Almighty are immutable; they have always been and will ever remain the same.

Human laws are complicated and difficult to understand. Therefore, we often depend, for their interpretation, on lawyers who have devoted years of study to secular laws. And even lawyers do not always agree on the interpretation of a given law. In contrast, the Eternal Laws are simple, clear, and easy to understand. No intellectual schooling, in the ordinary sense of the expression, is required. In fact, they are hinted at in the proverbs of all cultures. Human laws do not always promote justice; indeed, quite often "smart" lawyers exploit them to set free people who have actually committed crimes. Moreover, some laws are made to serve private but antisocial interests. In contrast, the Laws of Creation ensure that Justice, Love, and Purity are simultaneously upheld at all times.

Unlike the large number of laws men make for themselves, the Eternal Laws,

the Laws of Creation are rather few. For our particular purpose, they may be discussed as three interrelated and complementary Laws.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

One of the Laws by which God maintains Creation is the Law of Sowing and Reaping — popularly expressed in the words "whatever we sow, we are obliged to reap." This Law is described by various other expressions such as: the Law of Karma; the Law of Seed and Harvest; the Law of Cause and Effect; the Law of Reciprocal Action; and the Law of Retributive Justice. It is a Law that must be familiar to all Christians, for it is indicated in a number of Bible passages including the following:

> As I have seen, those who plough iniquity, and sow trouble, reap the same (Job 4:8).
>
> For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).
>
> For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit (Luke 6:43).
>
> Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

We know that if we sow mango, we can only reap mango and if we want to harvest wheat, we must sow wheat. This Law ensures the maintenance of order and perfect justice in Creation. Imagine what confusion and bewilderment would result if we could not be certain what the harvest would be whenever we planted any seed — if at one time, a planting of maize gave us wheat, at another time the same planting gave us mango etc. Because of this Law, we know what harvest to expect with each planting, and what we must plant if we desire a particular harvest. Every effect has a cause; and every cause must result in an effect.

It is important for us to note that this Law is no respecter of religions. Indeed, this is true for all the Laws of Creation as well as the Ten Commandments (which rightly understood are meant as a spiritual help to all human beings,

regardless of religion). If a Christian sows maize, he will reap maize; so also will a Jew, a Moslem, a Buddhist, or a pagan. If a pagan sows goodness, he is bound to reap goodness; so will a Bishop, a Hindu monk, or a Moslem Imam. Indeed, the Creator in His perfect Justice cannot be expected to discriminate on any basis in the operation of His Laws. This viewpoint has ample support in the Bible. For example, Peter once declared:

> Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in *every* nation *anyone* who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him (Acts 10: 34 - 35, italics mine).

The Apostle Paul made a similar point in several of his letters (see, for example, Romans 2: 9-11; Ephesians 6: 5-9; Colossians 3:25). He wrote: "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:9-11). *This fact should lead us to the realization that religions are only a means to an end, and not ends in themselves.* If our religion helps us to understand thoroughly the Will of the Almighty and shows us how to do this Will, then it has played its part. But we would be wrong to imagine that membership of any religion, spiritual movement, society, order, or sect would guarantee salvation.

In this regard, we may recall what the Lord Jesus Christ said:

> Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the Will of My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Despite this very clear statement of Jesus that what count are our works aligned to the Will of God, some Christian sects promote the idea that all one needs to be "born again" is a simplistic declaration of faith to the effect that Jesus is one's "personal savior." Only spiritually indolent persons given to self-deception would accept such an invitation to travel on the broad and easy road which cannot possibly lead to salvation. To be truly "born again" involves a complete personal adjustment to the true Will of God in all our thinking, speaking, and our deeds as well as in our general attitude to life.

The starting point, obviously, is to strive to understand the Will of God aright. And, of course, only the Creator can tell who has become really born again!

Let us proceed to learn a bit more about this Law of Sowing and Reaping, which holds the key to so many unsolved problems. Christians will, of course, understand that "sowing" is not limited to its ordinary agricultural sense. We "sow" through our thoughts, our words, our volitions, as well as our actions. This implies that we are all constantly sowing, be it only in our thinking and in our general attitude to life. If our thoughts are always good, we reap harvests of blessings; if they are evil, then we heap evils on ourselves. As we shift gear between good and evil, so do the harvests change.

We know that quite often men's outward actions are different from their thinking and their volition. A man may be giving you a big smile and saying nice words to you while planning to harm you; his volition is in conflict with his words and actions. A man makes a donation to the church even though he does not share the ideals and the objectives of the church. He simply wants the publicity or seeks favor from members of the church. In all such cases, the Law of Sowing and Reaping ensures that the harvests are weighed carefully to reflect not only the actions but also the related thoughts and underlying volition. Most human beings cannot read other people's thoughts nor fathom their real volition. And so, they cannot be good judges in the sense of the Eternal Laws. Hence we must heed the following admonition:

> Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matthew 7:1- 2).

This is not only another statement of the Law of Sowing and Reaping, but it also touches on the fact that we lack the ability to judge aright. For even when we observe the action and hear the words, we may not know the motives.

Another aspect of the Law of Sowing and Reaping, which we must note, is that one planted seed yields, at harvest, many seeds. The harvest is of the same kind (quality or species) as what was sown but its quantity is much

greater. Thus our actions, good or bad, return to us multiplied. The increase is the result of another Law — the Law of Attraction of Similar Species or the Law of Like Attracts Like, which is discussed later in this Chapter.

Moreover, we should note that the period between sowing and reaping depends on the nature of what is sown. Some grain crops are ready for harvests four months after planting, whereas some tree crops do not yield any harvests until after many years. Indeed, we plant some trees knowing full well that they will not be ready for harvesting in our lifetime. Even for the same crop, the period required for maturity may vary according to variety. For example, traditional varieties of cowpeas, also called beans, a food legume that is highly relished in West Africa, northeast Brazil, and southern United States, mature in about 100 days. Some modern varieties of the same crop are ready for harvesting in about 60 days after planting.

Such differences in the periods to maturity also apply to the actions, thoughts, words, prayers, and volitions of men. Thus, we can understand why a person doing evil now, will reap the consequences only in the future, near or distant. Similarly, the good fruits of the good man, who may now be suffering, will surely come. Furthermore, the good that may currently be falling on the laps of a bad man must be the good he did in the past. And the bad experiences of the person who is presently striving to do that which is good are the consequences of some wrong done in the past, which are only now ready for harvesting. The perfect Justice of the Almighty does not permit any arbitrariness. Everybody reaps only what he or she has personally sown in action, word, thought, volition, or general attitude to life.

There *appear* to be injustices in some cases only because of our own ignorance. A key aspect of this ignorance is our lack of the knowledge of or deliberate but unfortunate rejection of reincarnation. The truth is that some fruits we now reap, whether they are good or bad, were planted in some distant past, in previous earth-lives. On the other hand, some “seeds” we are now sowing may not be ready for harvest until a distant future, in the Beyond or in another earth-life. “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows that he will also reap.” The Creator grants us the Free Will to decide what we may or may not sow; but once we have done the sowing, we are obliged irrevocably to “eat the harvest.” It does not matter

who we are or what we profess as our religion.

Many persons, who have some knowledge of the Law of Sowing and Reaping readily, and without any difficulty, associate it with Divine Justice. But relatively few realize that in this Law also lies Divine Love. Consider a man who sows a good seed. The Law guarantees that at harvest he receives fruits of the same kind and this can be perceived as Justice. However, the effect of the Law is not only on quality or kind, but also on quantity. He who sows, for example, one seed of maize, may reap two cobs of maize containing hundreds of seeds. Is it not Love, when for one good seed, the Divine Will ensures a return of many good seeds?

Let us also note that Divine Love considers only what is of benefit to us *spiritually*. And what carries spiritual benefits may sometimes be quite uncomfortable or painful to us. Indeed, man must redefine love in his relationships with fellow human beings in terms of what will benefit them spiritually. In this connection, it may be remarked that some human actions and attitudes that appear to demonstrate love are unhelpful and wrong when considered from a spiritual standpoint.

The bitter fruits of the bad seeds we sowed are spiritually helpful reminders of the fact that we strayed from the way ordained by the Creator. Any adversity, pain or suffering should be seen as cues, hints of the need to re-examine our understanding of the Laws of the Creator and how we stand in relation to them. Such re-examinations, if done with integrity and in genuine humility, are bound to help us to grow spiritually. As we learn the right lessons and make necessary adjustments so that we sow only sweet seeds, the Law of Sowing and Reaping assures us of bountiful harvests of sweet fruits at the appropriate time. And this, surely, is Love.

Therefore, we see that the Law of Sowing and Reaping is a way by which God shows His Love, while at the same time ensuring His Justice. Divine Justice and Divine Love cannot be separated; they are one. God does not inflict suffering and tragedy on people. People bring them about purely by themselves, and by a process through which they could also ensure abundance, happiness and bliss for themselves. It is the working out of this Law of Sowing and Reaping that ensures “vengeance” and “recompense”.

And this clarifies the deep meaning of the Biblical passage: “Vengeance is mine and recompense” *(Deuteronomy* 32:35).

The Law of Sowing and Reaping is the mechanism by which the Creator ensures that vengeance and recompense are most precisely administered. That was why Jesus could say: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also …” (Matthew 5: 38-39). The basic principle of the Mosaic Law was that whoever harms another person should be punished for it and the punishment should match the offence, unlike the older Babylonian Code of Hammurabi in which punishment for a given harm varied according to the relative social status of the offender and the victim. Jesus implied that we should leave retaliation to the Law of Sowing and Reaping, which manifesting the Will of God, ensures justice with a precision and perfection that is beyond human capacity. The Mosaic law was intended to limit and control retaliation in the primitive society of the time of Moses. It was also to serve as a check on aggressive behavior and to permit necessary self-defence. And it should be stated that the teachings of Jesus do not condemn actions taken in pure self-defence and to discourage unbridled aggression. One should not give free rein to aggressive behavior and oppression as one would thereby be unwittingly promoting evil.

Attitude to the Suffering

Let us, right away, raise and answer a question that may well arise at this point in the minds of well-meaning Christians: does it follow from the Law of Sowing and Reaping that we do not have to worry about suffering people, since they are themselves responsible for their suffering? That is, may we maintain that they are only reaping what they sowed in this earth-life or in an earlier one and do not, therefore, deserve our help? *The Law of Sowing and Reaping should suggest the opposite to us*. The Law shows clearly the need to do good at all times; for whatever good we do out of a pure volition and to whomever we do it, be it an undeserving man or a good man, we stand to reap the good fruits.

In reality, any good we do, we do for ourselves because the consequences return to us as multiples of the good we did. Whenever we see somebody

suffering, we should consider ourselves as having an opportunity to sow good seeds. We should not concern ourselves with the cause of the person's suffering; we should not judge as we quite often do not know all the facts and so our judgments are likely to be wrong. Moreover, we should know that if a sufferer does not deserve help, nobody who is in a position to help will come into contact with him or her. And in any case any help rendered to undeserving persons might be ineffectual. It is also possible that our relationships in former earth-lives with a sufferer we come across may be such that we owe him/her a debt that we must pay through offering help at that point.

Another question that a Christian might ask has to do with forgiveness. For Christians, and indeed every human being, the issue of forgiveness is so important that a separate Chapter is devoted to it. The Chapter follows our discussion of two more Divine Laws.

Before considering other Laws of Creation, I must mention one important characteristic of the human spirit. It is the Free Will. As we do not picture a living person without a head, so there can be no human being without Free Will. It is an inseparable part of the spirit; thus every human being may, for example, choose what to sow. Having made the choice, he or she is compelled to reap the fruits. A man holding a loaded gun has the Free Will to decide whether or not to turn the gun on another person. If he does so, he is still free to decide whether or not to pull the trigger. Once he pulls the trigger, he has no control over what happens to his victim.

The Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species

"Like attracts like" is a Law of Creation. This Law is known variously as the Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species, the Law of Homogeneity, or the Law of Similar Species. The proverb "Birds of a feather flock together" hints at this Law. So also does the saying "Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are." Just as birds of a feather flock together, so do fishes of the same kind congregate. They congregate and move together in large groups called shoals or schools. This grouping has many advantages for them. For example, fishes in schools find food more readily and are less prone to attack by predators. A fish that strays from its school exposes itself to the risk of being attacked and killed by enemy fishes.

The Law of Homogeneity manifests itself in the relationships among persons and is also manifest in the natural communities of animals and plants. Those who have given some thought to their study of elementary chemistry see the effect of this Law quite clearly in the coming together of identical molecules to form compounds as well as in many chemical reactions. The Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species also ensures that if a particular species is split, the split parts will re-unite when the opportunity arises. It is for this reason that opposite poles of a magnet attract.

The fact that unlike poles of a magnet attract appears at first to be a contradiction of the Law of Attraction of Similar Species. Let us, therefore, take some time to reflect on it. Consider a bar magnet. Suppose we hold this magnet in such a way that the left end is the south pole and the right end the north pole. Imagine that we then cut the bar magnet into two (the two parts need not be equal). We now have two bar magnets. Call the left piece "magnet A" and the right piece "magnet B". By convention, the right end of "magnet A" is a new north pole, while the left end of "magnet B" becomes a new south pole. But remember that the right end of "magnet A" (the new north pole) and the left end of "magnet B" (the new south pole) were one and the same point before we cut the original bar magnet into two. Therefore, when the new north pole attracts the new south pole, we are merely witnessing the coming together of closely similar parts that were forcibly separated; adjacent molecules that were separated are given a chance to rejoin. And they do so, in accordance with the Creation Law of "Like Attracts Like." Whole species that are similar will attract. But so will the split parts of the same species seek to reunite.

Thus, the Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species is fundamental for everything that is striving for union in Creation. But what appears to be attraction can be differentiated into *genuine attraction* which takes place between *whole* species that are similar, and *the desire for a union of split parts of the same definite species.* The human being is not a whole species but only a splitting which carries within itself the desire for union. And this (sexual instinct being excluded) explains the natural attraction between man and woman. However, the thoughts, the deeds, and the volitions of human beings are whole species that attract similar species. In general, a split species

can give rise not only to split species but also to complete species.

When next you are at a gathering, observe this Law at work. Groups of people form themselves based on what the individuals have in common — be it profession, religious or spiritual beliefs, language, political opinion, love of fashion, a shared hatred etc. Hell is the flocking together of people who share similar evil tendencies or evil past. *This is to say that hell is not the creation of God*. If men did no evil, then there would be no gathering of the evil-minded; that is, there would be no hell!

Spiritual Qualities Come First

It is understandable that because we human beings are spiritual creatures, characteristics that have bearing on the spirit are the most important factors of homogeneity for us. Perhaps as a way of teaching us this lesson, Jesus, when told that His mother and His brethren were waiting to see Him, stretched forth His hand toward His disciples and said:

> Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the Will of my Father in heaven, is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12: 49-50).

It is to be expected that superficial persons and persons who have neither spiritual values nor an understanding for the inner and finer qualities would be attracted most readily only by outward appearances such as skin color, physical looks, fashion, etc. The fact that race and ethnicity are for many people the key considerations in their relationships with others is clear evidence of the pervasive superficiality and spiritual immaturity of humankind today. With increasing spiritual knowledge, particularly the knowledge of the right conception of reincarnation, the relative unimportance of a person's race and nationality becomes obvious. And one is then able to assess others on the basis of their worth as human beings, their character, their personal abilities, etc.

Children and their Families

The Law of Attraction of Similar Species and the Law of Sowing and Reaping determine the family, place, and other circumstances into which one is born. Every thought, word or act gives rise to a "form" that has a

characteristic consistency. Each “form” can be perceived with the sense appropriate to it. Thus, for example, thoughts can be “picked.” An act of conception sends a form into creation alerting the souls in the Beyond of an opportunity for an incarnation on earth. Of the many souls in the Beyond that might wish to incarnate, the one that succeeds is determined by its spiritual condition relative to the spiritual environments of the parents, particularly of the pregnant woman. Among possible pertinent factors would be the similarity between the volitions, strengths, weaknesses, propensities, etc. of the incoming soul and those of the prospective mother, father, any siblings, or someone whom the mother allows to exert a strong influence on her around the midpoint of pregnancy about which time incarnation takes place. In addition to these, any threads of fate dating from past lives that link members of the family to the incoming soul might also play a role.

Incarnation takes place about the middle of pregnancy. That is the time the incoming soul takes full possession of the foetus — the growing body, which it will use for its new earth-life. To ensure that nobody draws a wrong conclusion from this fact, we should state right away that it must not be imagined that abortion may be committed without spiritual repercussion at any time. The act of procreation is like inviting the many anxious souls in the Beyond to get ready for a chance to experience an earth-life, with all the opportunities an earth-life offers for spiritual development. Termination of a pregnancy before incarnation thus, at least, amounts to frustrating and dashing the hopes of an aspiring soul. Such an act cannot go unpunished. It is, of course, clear that abortion after incarnation has already taken place is, from the standpoint of the Laws of Creation, physical murder. The solution is to avoid conception.

We should never delude ourselves into believing that an action is necessarily without sin just because earthly laws permit it. We must always allow ourselves to be guided by the Will of God as expressed in His Laws. But we must first understand aright the Will of God. Knowledge and understanding are the key to right living.

In accordance with the Law of Attraction of Similar Species, a noble spirit will, in general, incarnate in a family of noble people; and, vice versa. Association with a not-so-honorable person by a pregnant woman may let

down a bridge for the incarnation of an ignoble soul who becomes a so-called black sheep in an otherwise honorable family. Nobility of spirit and spiritual characteristics in general are *not* inherited. Only physical, gross material characteristics are passed along through genetic processes.

Nor are genetic processes by any means accidental. The Law of Sowing and Reaping ensures that only those who have sown the necessary seeds are incarnated into families and places where they are bound to enjoy genetic advantage or suffer hereditary handicap. For example, as a given disease is conquered in a particular part of the world, those whose karma call for that disease can only incarnate in another country where the disease has not been wiped out.

In reality, nobody is a victim of circumstance. It follows that if we could rid the earth of all diseases and the causes of human suffering any souls that need to experience suffering would be unable to incarnate on earth. Similarly, if we would all strive to be noble in our thoughts, words, aspirations, deeds and intuitive perceptions, unworthy souls would find it impossible to incarnate on earth. And thereby the earth would become like Paradise.

The Law of Spiritual Gravity

A third Law of Creation, which should help our understanding of the process of reincarnation, is the Law of Spiritual Gravity. This Law may be explained by reference to the physical law of gravity, which is the form in which this Eternal Law manifests on earth. Whatever is light rises automatically, whereas that which is heavy falls.

At death, the spirit drops its physical cloak with the closely related astral body. What is left of the human being at this point is called the soul; this is to say that the soul is the spirit with its several cloaks but without the physical and astral bodies. Where the soul finds itself is then determined by the Law of Spiritual Gravity. Evil deeds, bad thoughts, wrong aspirations and attitudes make the spirit heavy. This heaviness causes the soul to sink; that is, to fall away in a direction opposite to that of Paradise. That is, it retrogresses. How deep it sinks, depends on how much it has immersed itself in wrong-doing and how heavy it has therefore become. Following its fall, it congregates with other souls that have similar weaknesses; again, in accordance with the Law

of the Attraction of Similar Species.

If, for example, greed is one of its major vices, it will get drawn to others who are as greedy and these will inflict greed on it continuously. The gathering of the greedy, constantly perpetrating greed on one another thereby forms a “greed section” of hell. Any dweller of the section who, through the distasteful experiences, becomes disgusted with greed and no longer wishes to be a part of it is automatically moved away — again according to Law. For, such a soul would have become different from the other souls in that environment and the Law of Attraction of Similar Species ensures its separation.

Noble actions, thoughts, and attitudes make the spirit light so that, once it has shed the physical body, it rises automatically toward Paradise, its real home. It rises along with similarly noble spirits from whom it receives love, and to whom it also gives love. Thus, the Law of Spiritual Gravity is the automatic mechanism by which the soul rises towards or falls away from Paradise.

Thomas Aquinas, recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as its foremost philosopher and theologian, in his *Summa Theologiae*, describes how departed souls reach their “places”, their immediate destinations. Aquinas says that bodies have a tendency to sink as well as to rise whereby their places are determined. “The pull from the higher worlds makes itself felt through ‘levitation’, and the pull from the lower world is felt as ‘gravity’, according to the quality of the past earthly life. The soul then follows, as it were, the magnetic pull from that supersensible region to which it feels akin, either ‘gravitating’ or ‘levitating’ as the case may be.” (*Summa Theologiae* Suppl. 69.2, cited by Rudolf Frieling in his *Christianity and Reincarnation*). His description tallies remarkably with the Law of Spiritual Gravity as outlined above. We should also note that the process described by Thomas Aquinas implies the working of the Law of Attraction of Similar Species.

Chapter 10. The Divine Laws and the Matter of Forgiveness

Through an Eternal Law you are burdened with an irrevocable obligation to make atonement, which you can never cast upon others. What you burden yourselves with through your thoughts, words or deeds can be redeemed by no one but yourselves!

Consider, were it otherwise Divine Justice would be but an empty sound, in which case everything else would also crumble into ruins.
("In the Light of Truth," The Grail Message, Volume I, Lecture "Ascent")

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In the last Chapter, we discussed three Laws of Creation or Divine Laws that are basic to an understanding of the process of reincarnation as well as other questions pertaining to it. I indicated that these Laws — the Law of Sowing and Reaping, the Law of Attraction of Similar Species (the Law of Homogeneity) and the Law of Spiritual Gravity — are manifestations of the Will of the Creator and that they govern all happenings in Creation. Nothing can happen outside these Laws. It is in the sense of the strict operation of these immutable Laws that one can understand that, as stated in the Bible, even the fall of one sparrow is known to the Creator (Matthew 10:29).

In explaining the Law of Sowing and Reaping, it was stated that one reaps whatever one sows without fail. In connection with this Law, a Christian might ask if forgiveness is possible within the framework of these Divine Laws. The answer would be *yes*, of course! God *does* forgive; for He is not only Justice, He is also Love. Divine Justice and Divine Love are inseparable. That both Justice and Love are built into the Law of Sowing and Reaping has already been noted and illustrated.

As a starting point, let's consider the spiritual meaning of forgiveness. It is the complete wiping away of a wrong-doing in such a manner that it is as if

the forgiven person never committed that particular wrong. It is this meaning that is implied in the Biblical statement:

> I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25).

It should be easy to understand that forgiveness in this sense of complete wiping away of a wrong-doing, of "blotting out" of guilt, cannot come to a person of evil disposition. It can only be granted to those who have resolved firmly and earnestly to do the Will of God; those who are determined to keep their thoughts pure and, who as a matter of course, desist from doing anything that would harm their neighbors.

To understand the natural process that leads to forgiveness, we start with the knowledge that everything takes on form; our thoughts, words, actions and every movement of our spirit give rise to forms. The nature of the form and the plane of existence to which it belongs depend on its origin. Thus, forms arising from thoughts differ from those of words, which are in turn different from those of actions etc. A man's weaknesses and propensities from which arise his wrong and evil thoughts, words, and deeds also have forms that take root in him.

As we think, speak or act, appropriate forms with roots in us are sent into Creation. These forms attract or are attracted to their own types, in accordance with the Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species. At the right time, such forms return to us multiplied and we are obliged to harvest the fruits corresponding to the nature of the original thoughts, words, or deeds. It should be stated again that this reciprocal action, this harvesting of what one has sown, is not a punishment, but an opportunity and a help for one to recognize how one stands in relation to the Will of the Almighty. As we reap the returning bitter fruit, the form that arose from us is uprooted, and the particular guilt is redeemed, provided that we consciously recognize that we deserve the bitter fruit and commit ourselves to change; as happened with the Penitent Thief on the Cross.

It is sadly the case that often, while we are suffering as a consequence of an earlier wrongdoing, we question and doubt the Justice of God. "Why must

this happen to me?" one often hears people asking. Many react badly, curse and swear, when confronted with the bitter fruits of their own sowing. Through such reactions, they perpetuate cycles of sowing evil and reaping evil for themselves. On the other hand, an earnest resolution for what is good, and a firm conviction in the Justice and Love of the Almighty ensure that the soil for conscious wrongdoing and evil ceases to exist in one. One's weaknesses and propensities wither away, and one may then expect forgiveness. On this matter, the author of the work, *"In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message, declares:

> Reformation alone is the living road to forgiveness! (Volume II, Lecture "I Am the Lord Thy God").

And the forgiveness earned in this manner is so complete that it is as though no offence was ever committed. We recall that, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the son was treated as though he had never done wrong once he found his way back to his father.

Forgiveness is not Arbitrary

It should be understood that forgiveness is not arbitrary. The Creator in His perfection never acts arbitrarily in anything. The Grace of the Almighty does exist, but only those who have fulfilled the conditions prescribed by the Divine Laws can enjoy it. Those who go against or ignore the Will of God are automatically barred from God's Grace. Our Lord, Jesus Christ said that He did not come to destroy the Law, which includes the Law of Sowing and Reaping. And so in the prayer that He gave to humankind, we find this statement: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us." And on another occasion, Jesus Christ told His disciples:

> And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses (Mark 11: 25 - 26).

These are clear declarations that forgiveness is not unconditional, not arbitrary. If we want forgiveness, we must work for it. It is also a statement

of the Law of Sowing and Reaping — to obtain forgiveness, one must sow forgiveness. In addition to achieving forgiveness through suffering the full consequence of a wrong-doing, there is another process by which one may earn forgiveness. It is through what might be called symbolic redemption, a process that accords fully with the Divine Laws.

Symbolic Redemption

To illustrate the process of symbolic redemption, let us recall our statement that everything takes on form. A man who is firmly resolved to give purity to his every thought, word, and deed is enveloped by good forms. These forms attract their own kinds and they become a strong, possibly impenetrable protective covering around him. Any evil forms, arising from his past thoughts, words or actions, that may approach him are deflected and repulsed by the layer of good forms now surrounding him, since unlike forms must repel. Thus, he does not experience any pain as a consequence of his earlier wrongdoing.

The strength of the invisible protective layer depends on the strength of the person's goodness. It can happen that the incoming evil forms are able to penetrate the protective layer; but even then they would be weakened. As an illustration, a guilt which would otherwise have imposed life imprisonment on a man could be redeemed through his simple act of lovingly helping a child or an elderly person to cross a busy street. The help so rendered, purely out of love, becomes the act that redeems his past grievous guilt. He has earned symbolic redemption.

Thus, we note that symbolic redemption depends on the Divine Laws. It is not arbitrary. Suppose we think, speak or do evil. The appropriate evil form goes forth into Creation and gathers strength by attracting existing forms similar to it. Eventually, it returns to us as multiples of its original self. However, the impact, the effect it has on us, depends on how we stand spiritually at the time of its return. If we are still our old evil selves, we would attract the incoming evil consequence in accordance with the Law of Homogeneity. The incoming evil would, therefore, hit us with full force, unleashing its full impact on us.

However, if we have changed and have become good before the evil

consequence returns, we would automatically repel it; again in compliance with the same Law of Attraction of Similar Species. How effectively we repel, or force back the returning bad fruit of our evil thought, word, or deed, would depend on the extent to which we have changed for the better, i.e., on the extent of our reformation. If we have changed sufficiently, the returning bad fruit would be shattered and it would have no unpleasant effect on us, or the effect might be so slight that we would hardly notice it. For such slight harm, the Yoruba people of Nigeria have an apt saying: that one should be grateful in that what could have cut one's head, has merely removed one's cap! This is forgiveness — symbolic redemption.

To aid our understanding, we may also liken the process of this kind of forgiveness to tuning a radio. If, at 2300 Hours GMT, one tuned to 5975 Kilo Hertz, one would in some parts of the world, hear "world news" on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). But if one shifted to another wavelength, say 6000, one would no longer receive the world news. The wavelength can be thought of as one's spiritual condition, and the incoming message the returning consequence of one's previous thoughts, words, or deeds. When a man has changed from evil to good, or vice versa, it is as if he has tuned to a different wavelength. The message he would have received on the old wavelength would still arrive but he would not be aware of it. This is what happens in the specific case of my tuning away from 5975; the action stops me from hearing the BBC world news, even though the news is still being broadcast and any radio tuned to 5975 would receive it.

In a similar manner, by becoming good, a person may redeem symbolically his previous sins; he earns forgiveness. Conversely, one might not harvest the joys one had sown in the past, if one has become evil at the time the good fruits return. Moreover, the help sent to us in answer to a prayer may not reach us because of our own evil heart. Thus, we see in all simplicity that we are, indeed, the architects of our own fates, and that forgiveness depends on us and is always within our reach.

We can obtain "forgiveness" the hard way through experiencing the full consequences of our volitions, thoughts, words, or deeds; or through the easy way by becoming good. "Good" not as defined by us or by our flatterers but as determined by the extent to which we live according to the Will of the

Almighty, according to how we obey the Divine Laws. Obviously, we can only do God's Will, if we understand It. Therefore, our first task is to become thoroughly familiar with the Divine Laws that manifest the Will of God in Creation.

Who Can Forgive?

We have emphasized the teaching of Jesus Christ that we should forgive those that offend us. This teaching implies that everybody has the power to forgive any offences committed against him or her; if we did not have the power to forgive, Jesus would not require us to forgive. He would never ask us to do what we could not do. Moreover, we know that in all His teachings and actions, Jesus always upheld the Will of God that is expressed in the Divine Laws of Creation which we discussed in Chapter 9. Thus, the teaching that we should forgive, accords fully with the Divine Laws.

Let me outline how it is that we are able to forgive the sins committed against us. I explained earlier that with our every action, word or thought, an invisible form (a thread of fate) arises and takes root in us. This form goes forth, attracted by other forms that arose from similar actions, words or thoughts. In due course, the form returns to us fully laden with the appropriate harvest. The victim of the sin we commit is linked by invisible threads to the form that arises. Because of this connection, the victim has the power to cut the threads of fate arising from the sin. Through his heartfelt decision not to avenge or take offence and his desire that the offender should not suffer for the sin, the victim cuts the threads. Because the threads are cut, the form withers; the offender is thereby set free from the consequences of that particular sin.

Therefore, an important way by which we can earn forgiveness is to plead for forgiveness with the victims of our offences. We should go directly to the person we offended, acknowledge or "confess" our wrong-doing and plead for forgiveness. In this connection, it is important to note that whereas the person offended can forgive, a third party, who is in no way affected, does not have the power to forgive. A third party, such as a clergyman, is not in any way linked with the form that arose as a result of the offence and, therefore, he does not have the power to cut the threads of fate involved. This is why a clergyman cannot forgive the sins of anybody, except the sins

committed against him *personally*.

The presumption that a priest can forgive the sins of members of his church is probably based on what Jesus is reported to have told His Disciples immediately after His resurrection:

> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (John 20:23).

Jesus is reported to have made the statement when He suddenly appeared to ten of his Disciples (Judas Iscariot had committed suicide and Thomas was not present) who were assembled in a locked room. He blessed them and sent them forth to spread His Message, and then told them that whichever sins they forgave would be forgiven, and those they did not forgive would not be forgiven.

The right understanding of what Jesus told His disciples is simply that they had the power to forgive or not to forgive any sins committed against them personally, as individuals. Jesus was definitely not giving them a general license to forgive sins perpetrated against other people. In accordance with the Laws of His Father, which He knew and upheld at all times, the Disciples could not forgive the sins of third parties. If we recall the intolerable sufferings to which the Disciples were later subjected, the grievous sins perpetrated against them as they spread the teachings of Jesus Christ, we would readily understand why their Master needed to remind them that they had the power to forgive or not to forgive their torturers and murderers. Jesus was, in effect, urging His Disciples to forgive the sins that He knew would be committed against them in the course of spreading His Message.

Forgiveness, like everything else, is governed by the Laws that God put into Creation from its very beginning. Indeed, Creation came into being in accordance with these Laws. Therefore, arbitrary forgiveness of sin is impossible. It is for this reason that a third party, that is, somebody who is not in any way connected with an offence cannot grant forgiveness for that offence. If I offend Mr. Doe, I should seek forgiveness from Mr. Doe, not from a priest. A priest may counsel or advise me, but he does not have the power to forgive me, no matter what he or anybody else may believe. A

priest can, of course, forgive whatever sins anybody commits against him *personally*, just like everybody else.

Let us also reflect along the following lines. Even if Christ gave His Disciples the power to forgive the sins of whomever they pleased (which He certainly did not do), would that give any church official, no matter how highly placed, the right to forgive? Is it really reasonable to imagine that clergymen, however high their ranks, can be equated with the Disciples of Jesus Christ? Let us remember that the Disciples were called or chosen individually by Jesus Himself. But in the vast majority of cases, men become priests by their own choice, just as they might have chosen to be lawyers, doctors, booksellers, etc. And we know, of course, that people attain to high offices in churches, including the highest offices, through election by fellow human beings. The Disciples of Christ are in a class by themselves. A little humility should facilitate our understanding in many matters, including this one.

The Sin against the Holy Spirit

We have indicated in the foregoing sections that a sin may be forgiven directly by the victim of the sin. It may also be forgiven symbolically through a complete inner change on the part of the sinner before the fruits of the sin return to him. A third way by which a sin is "forgiven" is through suffering the full consequences of the sin. Once one has so harvested what one sowed, it is as if one had never committed that particular sin. The sin is "blotted" out.

The third process, which is the working out of the Law of Sowing and Reaping, is not considered as forgiveness by most people. Forgiveness, in its ordinary sense, is assumed not to entail reaping of any fruits, or suffering any consequences for an offence. In this sense one obtains forgiveness only by being forgiven by the offended person or through obtaining symbolic redemption in the manner already described.

An understanding of these processes by which forgiveness is granted or earned holds the key to a Biblical statement that must have baffled many Christians. It is the statement that implies that any sin may be forgiven, but not the sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12: 31-32; Mark 3:29, and Luke 12:10). Many people must wonder why it is that blasphemy

against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, even though a sin against the Son of God can be forgiven.

Jesus personifies the Love of the Almighty, whereas the Holy Spirit is the Executive Will of God, the Spirit of Truth, who is responsible for the World Judgment. The Work of the Holy Spirit lies in the unchanging and incorruptible Divine Laws of Creation. Jesus Christ did forgive sins committed against Him; for example, on the crucifixion cross, He said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is clear, therefore, that sins committed against Jesus, the Love of God, can be forgiven.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is the Justice of the Almighty Who works through the Divine Laws. Any sin against the Holy Spirit brings about unfailingly the full consequence, in accordance with the Law of Sowing and Reaping. In short, whereas a sin against Jesus Christ could be forgiven by Jesus Himself, that against the Holy Spirit compels the sinner to go through the mills of the Law of Sowing and Reaping. The one who sowed the seed must reap it; no one else can reap it for him. In accordance with this Law, Jesus cannot reap the fruits resulting from the sins of others. We certainly can say that we have it on the authority of Jesus Himself that anybody who sins against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven and, therefore, Jesus could not have died for such sins. Let it be noted that Jesus, the Son of God, is fully subject to the Laws of God just as ordinary creatures like us. Remember what He said:

> Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5: 17).

Nobody can forgive any sins against the Holy Spirit.

The Attitude of the Victim

The discussion so far has centered on how the offender obtains forgiveness. Let us now consider forgiveness from the standpoint of the victim of the offence. We have, in fact, already done so indirectly. We did so when we quoted the admonition contained in the Lord's Prayer that we should forgive those that offend us so that our Heavenly Father may forgive us our own sins. The same admonition is made in the Bible passage in Mark (11:25-26) quoted

earlier in this chapter.

Thus, the position of the victim of an offence is clear: he is provided an opportunity to sow forgiveness so that he may reap forgiveness. If he does not take advantage of the opportunity, he is the loser for it. Our decision to forgive should, therefore, not depend on the attitude of the offender. We should forgive, whether or not the offender is repentant. In accordance with the Divine Laws, whenever we forgive, we are bound to reap forgiveness, regardless of the condition or attitude of the person who wronged us.

When offended, we sometimes consider it necessary to react, and after reacting we may find ourselves wondering if we have not burdened ourselves with guilt. It should be understood that some of our reactions that may be unpleasant to the offender may not necessarily be wrong. Consider that the Son of God drove out those who were selling and buying in the temple and "overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons" (Mark 11:15). It was in the best interest of the sellers, buyers, and money-changers to be forcibly prevented from continuing to desecrate or defile the temple. Thus, the action of Jesus was borne out of genuine love. We know that parents must sometimes deal severely with their own children not because they hate them but, on the contrary, out of love; they want their children to turn out right!

Therefore, we may take action against offenders but we must be certain that our reactions are well-considered. We should never act out of vengeance but out of love for the offender. In this connection, we should also understand that genuine love considers only that which is of *spiritual* benefit to the person loved. In reacting, most people unfortunately allow their own weaknesses to take sway; they react in retaliation and with no thought whatsoever of what would truly change the offender. We must reflect very carefully before we react, lest we burden ourselves with guilt.

Forgiveness and Reincarnation

Before we conclude this chapter, let us recall the link between forgiveness and reincarnation. Some of the offences, or sins we commit are not forgiven before we die. The nature of some of such offences is such that the consequences must be experienced on earth. And so we are obliged to return

to the earth to harvest our plantings.

Some repent only on their deathbeds, out of fear, uncertainty, simple prudence or because of better spiritual understanding as the connection between the physical body and the soul begins to loosen. This last-minute change of heart happens so frequently that a term has been coined for it — the death-bed repentance syndrome. It should be easy to understand that, according to the Divine Laws, such repentance will bring help in the Beyond and in a subsequent earth-life only to the extent that it represents genuine and permanent spiritual change. But many who die suddenly do not even have time to consider change. And others are too confused or debased to think about a spiritual change. Consider, for example, the man who kills many people and then commits suicide. For these and other reasons, many human beings carry huge loads of sins with them into the Beyond.

The inexplicable blows of fate and the diverse uncomfortable circumstances that we observe everywhere on earth are the consequences of the unsettled old debts that men carry over from previous earth-lives, and any fresh debts they incur during current earth-lives. God is absolutely just. But only an understanding of His perfect and unchanging Laws as well as the reality of reincarnation can lift the fact of God’s absolute Justice from mere belief to strong conviction.

Chapter 11. Answers to Key Questions

Give God the honor of perfection! Then you will find the key to the unsolved riddles of all life. ("In the Light of Truth," The Grail Message, Volume I, Lecture "Errors").

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.
*(*John *16: 12-13).*

23 23 23
11 11 11

In previous chapters, we discussed the right conception of reincarnation, summarized the history and the bases for Christian belief in reincarnation, and made the Biblical case for reincarnation. The Divine Laws also called the Laws of Creation, which are the mechanism by which the Almighty manifests His Will and maintains Creation, have been discussed and illustrated with respect to reincarnation and to forgiveness. As Christians and others reflect on reincarnation several questions arise. Is reincarnation an endless process? If not, how many reincarnations are permitted each human spirit? Why is it that most people do not remember their past incarnations? If reincarnation is true, why has the human population on earth been increasing? We are now in a position to answer these and related questions.

Reincarnation is Not Endless

In the second Chapter, we outlined the reason why human spirits come to the earth at all. We stated that we human beings are on earth because the earth provides critically important kinds of experiences that help us to become

self-conscious and to achieve the highest potentials inherent in us as human spirits. This is to say that our sojourn on earth has a definite purpose. Once a particular human spirit has achieved this purpose, it is easy to understand that he or she would no longer need to come to the earth. Therefore, reincarnation on earth cannot be, nor was it intended to be, an endless process.

A human spirit that has acquired the necessary nobility and maturity would ordinarily no longer have anything in common with the earth. The Law of the Attraction of Similar Species and the Law of Spiritual Gravity would ensure that the human spirit is attracted away and that it rises toward Paradise where similar noble and mature spirits have their abode. Such a human spirit does not need to reincarnate on earth any longer. But it may voluntarily request to return to the earth to carry out a specific mission connected with helping less mature human beings.

There is yet another reason why reincarnation is not endless. Even if the activities and conditions of some human spirits were such that they require endless reincarnations on earth, it is obvious that such would be possible only for as long as the earth continues to exist as a habitable planet. If the earth "comes to an end" (Matthew 24:3, 14) or, for any number of plausible reasons, becomes uninhabitable, reincarnations would necessarily end. But will the world, or can the world come to an end? The earth is much more delicately balanced than most people realize; certain relatively slight changes can make the earth uninhabitable. As the Anthropic Principle indicates, this earth is "tailor-made" for us just as it is, precisely for our existence and needs. Even the slightest alteration in its fundamental physical constants would have prevented the development and the continuance of the human race. Astronomers and astrophysicists provide evidence that the earth could cease to exist; for they report, from time to time, explosions and subsequent disappearances from the universe of bodies that are much larger than our earth.

And who does not know that man has succeeded in developing and amassing nuclear weapons sufficient to destroy the earth many times over? And has not our modern "civilization" created technologies whose by-products have proved to be slow-acting but fatal poisons? Whether with a bang or a whimper, whether in a flash or through a prolonged process of deterioration,

whether in one fit of madness by a nation or some groups or through carelessness and neglect by many, the world *can* “come to an end.”

We are also justified in assuming that the world will come to an end because of the Law of the Cycle. This Law, also called the Law of Revolution, ensures that, in the world of matter, whatever has a beginning has an end and that the end always flows back into the beginning. There is an eternal forming, a joining together of basic materials, which, after a certain time, again dissolve into their original components in order thereafter, purified and refreshed, to unite anew in other forms. Nature provides many examples. When, for example, we plant the seed of maize, it germinates and the seedling grows rapidly at first. Then the growth rate slows down as the maize plant matures. The plant bears flowers, followed by the cobs with its seeds. Finally, growth ceases, the cobs ripen, and the plant dies. The dry seeds from the cobs may be planted again, and the cycle is repeated. This cycle of coming into existence and passing away is “without end.” However, every phase of the cycle, every happening during the cycle does have an end.

Our earth and the entire world of matter had a beginning and, in obedience to this Law of the Cycle, will come to an end. The end of the earth will also put an end to the possibility of further reincarnations. Any human spirits who have not matured sufficiently to have left the world of matter at the time of the disintegration will experience spiritual death, suffer eternal damnation — the only kind of death that man should and must dread. Consider: any animal that does not get away from a burning bush because it is indolent, inattentive, or fails to find an escape route gets burnt with the bush. So it is with the human spirit in the material parts of Creation. Human beings who, for whatever reasons, have not left the world of matter by the time the world must come to an end will suffer disintegration — that is, spiritual death.

Many must have heard predictions of an imminent end of the world; imminent in the sense of a few years or decades. Some such “prophets” even give specific dates; many such dates have long passed. They are all wrong. For, the promise of the Millennium (the thousand-year reign of the Will of the Almighty on earth) must first be fulfilled. What we are witnessing today is the great purification in preparation for the Millennium. While the purification rages on, human beings are permitted new spiritual knowledge;

the knowledge he needs for the Millennium. The Laws of Creation, and reincarnation, correctly understood, are aspects of the necessary new knowledge.

The earth is nearing the end of its cycle, which started many millions of years ago. The Grail Message tells us that the earth admitted its first sets of incarnations of human spirits about midway in its cycle; rather like the manner that the foetus admits an incarnating soul about the middle of pregnancy, at a definite stage of maturity of the foetus. Corresponding to its advanced stage, the earth can now admit only old human spirits — human spirits that began their own cycles of development a long time ago. This is to say that, at a certain stage in the earth's cycle, it became impossible for human spirits coming fresh from the spiritual realm to incarnate on this earth. Thus, we can say that, in general, beginning a very long time ago, all incarnations on earth have been reincarnations. In general, we have all been here before.

The reader may well ask if human spirit germs are no longer leaving Paradise in search of development. The simple answer is that they still do. It is a continuous happening. However, these fresh incarnations go to other gross material parts of Creation that are like our earth but are younger. They are younger in the sense that they are not as advanced as our earth in their cycles of development. They have only reached the midpoint of their cycles and are therefore able to admit fresh human spirits just as our earth did millions of years back. Whether or not earthmen can ever make contact with such celestial bodies on which other human beings live is a different matter.

The First Set of Incarnations

How did the first set of human beings get to the earth since there were no human mothers on earth? Even though the subject is somewhat outside the scope of this book, I believe that a sketchy answer would be helpful to the reader and it is presented below.

Let us recall that human spirits left Paradise as unconscious spirit germs or spirit seeds. On their journey to the earth, they had to pass through various intervening regions of the Beyond where they achieved a measure of development. By the time they got close to the earth, a great deal of

development had already taken place on earth. For at that point the earth was already midway in its cycle of development and many creatures including non-human animals had already come into existence. The most highly developed of the animals could already make use of various aids for their sustenance and defence. Those animals that had reached the peak of their development, and had become as close to humans as an animal could possibly be, formed the bridge for the human souls in the immediate Beyond to enter the earth. Thus, it happened that when acts of procreation took place among these animals, when the animals became pregnant, instead of animal souls incarnating in their wombs, fresh immature human spirits incarnated in them. The immediate offspring had animal bodies but their inner cores, their real selves, were human spirits.

More and more fresh human spirits then incarnated in these and subsequent offspring, which were spiritual. Under the control of human spirits, and over millions of years, the animal bodies were gradually refined until the present human bodies were attained. It should be emphasized that only the first set of human spirits incarnated in the bodies of the most highly developed animals. The animals merely formed a temporary bridge. Those animals, which were like the present anthropoid apes, became extinct shortly after. They had fulfilled their ordained function as temporary bridges for human spirits to reach the earth. Thereafter, members of that species of animals no longer came into existence and, therefore, incarnation in animal bodies was no longer possible, nor necessary. The process was possible because of the homogeneity or closeness that existed between the highest level of development of that particular animal species and the lowest level of development of the human spirit.

Biological Evolution and Creationism

Equipped with this knowledge, we can readily see how pointless the controversies about creationism and biological evolution are. Some Christians went to court to prevent the teaching of biological evolution in schools while other Christians sought “balanced treatment” for so-called creation science and evolution science in classroom lectures, textbooks, and library materials. Many scientists, ignorant of, or uninterested in spiritual matters, reject the account of Creation out of hand. They have never sought, and do not understand, the basis for the validity of creationism. Therefore,

they feel obliged to pooh-pooh and deplore the concept of creationism.

The actions of both groups, creationist Christians and scientists, believers and non-believers, are based on the assumption that biological evolution is incompatible with the Biblical account of Creation. Some who wish to be evenhanded in this matter propose that both creationism and evolution should be taught as theories rather than facts. In effect, they ask that creation science and evolution science be considered as *alternative* explanations of the origin of human beings and of the entire material universe. The assumption of incompatibility is false. Creation science and evolution science should not be considered alternative but *complementary* explanations of the origin of human beings on earth. It is said that half education is dangerous; the acrimonious debate about creation and biological evolution is a case in point.

One must, however, make a clarification. The word creationism is also used to describe the teaching of some Christian sects implying that each time a baby is to be born, God creates a new soul for the baby that is coming on to the earth. This teaching implies that God chooses to create some souls for bodies that may die soon after birth, or live for a hundred years, be blind, deaf and dumb, or be so physically strong and fit as to enable them to win many Olympic Games medals, be geniuses or imbeciles etc. In other words, this concept of creationism implies that God is arbitrary and unjust. One must disagree strongly and completely reject creationism in this sense of the creation of a new soul for every new birth. This issue was discussed more fully in Chapter 4, where we considered alternatives to reincarnation.

We discussed, in Chapter 2, the *Genesis* account of creation. We noted that the *spirit* of the human being (the real person) was created but the body, the outermost cover of the spirit, developed through the process of evolution. This process was first described in 1859 by Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution, which emphasized natural selection and the survival of the fittest. Recent discoveries in molecular biology suggest that evolution is more complex than scientists originally imagined. But those discoveries and any new findings do not affect the validity of the explanations presented here. As we indicated above, the first set of incoming human spirits took over the bodies of the most highly developed animals and these bodies were gradually refined, through the process of evolution, to the state human bodies are today.

But this evolution has nothing to do with the real person, the spirit. The spirit, the inner core that makes a person a human being, was created whereas its outermost cloak, the physical body, evolved biologically; the animal was one stage in that evolutionary process.

Both animal and human bodies belong to the world of matter and are tools for use during the time on earth. When the real owners of these bodies leave the earth, they drop the bodies, their earthly vestments, and these then "turn to dust." But the "owners" go their separate ways; for they are of a different species. The origin of human beings is the spiritual realm while that of the chimpanzee and other animals is the animistic realm, which lies below the spiritual part of Creation. The higher standing of human beings in Creation relative to the chimpanzee is the explanation for their vastly superior abilities, despite the fact that, on earth, their bodies have closely similar genetic make-up.

Summing up

We have tried to show that reincarnation is not an endless process. As man severs all his ties with the earth and achieves the necessary spiritual maturity, he ceases to reincarnate. We know that we can terminate the cycle of reincarnations ourselves by learning the Will of the Almighty and doing It persistently and at all times so that we become so noble in spirit that the only place we can go is upward to Paradise. Furthermore, reincarnations will come to an end when the earth and lower-lying realms suffer disintegration in the normal course of development and in conformity with the Law of the Cycle.

It should also become clear from the above that there can be no fixed number of reincarnations for each human being. It all depends on what each person does with the incarnations he is permitted. This is, again, a familiar happening. Some university students take many courses every semester, work very hard and complete the requirements for a degree in a relatively short time. Other students fail many courses which they are therefore obliged to retake. Others, out of indolence or misapplication, are eventually compelled to leave the university without earning any degrees. The process is similar in the school of spiritual life.

Interval between Consecutive Incarnations

A related question often asked has to do with the length of the interval between consecutive incarnations on earth. The Eternal Laws of Creation discussed in Chapter 9, operating in accordance with the circumstances of each individual, determine the interval. Therefore, it cannot be the same for every soul. This is in the same manner as the duration of an earth-life varies from person to person in the same community. And when we consider population averages, we find differences in the life expectancies of citizens across countries.

Depending on the experiences a soul is obliged to go through in the Beyond, he may return to the earth after a short or long stay. Some souls are compelled to undergo long periods of experiencing in the finer material realms of the immediate Beyond on account of the seeds they sowed in an earlier earth-life. Even if two souls have to undergo the same set of experiences, they may not stay in the Beyond for the same length of time. This is because the reactions of the souls to the same experience may differ. And these reactions would affect their further progress, in accordance with the Law of Sowing and Reaping as well as the Law of Homogeneity. Some souls may quickly learn the right lessons from an experience in the Beyond, be it a joyful or sorrowful one; others never learn, and so are unable to make progress. While opportunities for incarnation on earth may abound, a soul that wishes to incarnate may be unable to take advantage of such opportunities because of the threads of fate it has woven for itself. In contrast, another soul may be in a position to take up the very first opportunity offered as a result of its own conduct and past weavings. And so, there is no fixed interval between consecutive incarnations; the length of the interval always depends on the nature and circumstances of each soul.

The Matter of Memory

Some of the key questions people ask about reincarnation relate to memory. They ask: if reincarnation is a fact, why do we not remember? And, if we do not remember, how does reincarnation help our spiritual progress?

These questions often arise because of lack of clarity about the nature of memory. Many who ask the questions think of memory only in its ordinary physical sense of day-conscious recollection. Science tells us that memory in this sense may depend on the storage of certain proteins in our brain. Since

with death the brain, with the stored proteins, decomposes and returns to dust, it is not reasonable to expect that one should remember, in the ordinary physical sense, the events of a previous earth-life. There is simply no basis for it.

However, we can think about memory in a different sense. The spirit certainly retains the significant experiences of its earth-lives. If and when the channels of communication between it and the frontal brain are open, one can "remember" experiences of a previous life. This may happen in a waking condition or in an unusually vivid and perhaps dramatic dream. Thus, some people have written accounts of their past lives. Such writers include Joan Grant, John Masefield, Alfred Tennyson, and Friedrich von Schiller in his *Wallenstein*. Other people are reported to have attained to knowledge of their past lives through what is called "hypnotic age regression." This is a process in which a hypnotized person is gradually made to go back in time until he recalls an earlier earth-life. Hypnotic regressions have been carried out by many professional psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and even adventurous amateur hypnotists.

Here, a serious warning is imperative. It should be stated emphatically that hypnosis harms the *spirit,* and no one should allow himself to be hypnotized. Hypnosis and many occult practices that are generally considered innocuous and harmless, in fact, do damage to the spirit, even when they may appear to be helping the physical body.

We may also note that sometimes a place seems strangely familiar to us even though we are visiting it for the very first time. At other times, we go through an experience that we are almost certain we have gone through before, even though mental reflection assures us that this is not the case. Similarly, some people appear to us positively familiar, whereas we are meeting them for the first time in this earth-life. These experiences are so common that the expression "*déjà vu*" has been coined for them. "*Déjà vu*" experiences may be considered a form of "memory". It should be stated, however, that reincarnation is not the only possible explanation for such experiences. Some things are first experienced in a non-earthly realm, for example in a dream, before they are encountered on earth.

Before we pursue the question of memory further, let us note that just because we do not remember a particular event does not mean that the event is a fiction, that it did not take place. I do not remember when I learnt to sit. Nor do I recall when I learnt to walk. Somehow, I cannot remember how and when I learnt to read. And yet, I did learn to sit, walk, and read. The "memory" of the lessons lies in the fact that I am able to sit, walk, and read; things new-born babes don't do.

Science tells us that, through the process of genetic inheritance, our physical make-ups owe a great deal to our parents, grandparents and their ancestors. We inherit from a large number of persons in our chain of ancestors. In the line of our direct ancestors we have 2 parents, 4 grandparents, 8 great-grandparents, 16 great- great-grandparents, etc. In four generations, there are 30 ancestors for each of us. How many of these do we know? In my case I know only 4. And yet I do not have any sense of loss. It is sufficient for me to know that my biological make-up includes something from these 30 persons and many more. I do not need to know who they are. How much of our earlier years do we remember? Very little. Conscious recollection of the events of those years is not important; what is important is the lessons we learnt, the abilities we acquired during the period.

In a manner similar to the above, the experiences of our previous earth-lives have been absorbed by our spirits and manifest in the form of our various abilities, strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices, inclinations, etc. Thus, our present personality is the product not only of the experiences of our present earth-life but also of our total existence, which includes previous earth-lives and the intervening sojourns in the Beyond. Every person's present personality includes a lot that constitutes the "memory" of his/her past lives.

Let us also consider that it is a great grace that most of us do not remember the details of our past earth-lives. How would you feel if you were to recall a past in which you were a mass murderer? Would the enormity of the crime not weigh you down so much that you would give up spiritual striving? And how does the knowledge that you were a king in an earlier incarnation help you in this earth-life in which you find yourself a farm hand? You might become an arrogant and vain farm hand and earn yourself the sack — and

you might wind up being worse off. Why torture yourself about the fact that in some earlier earth-life you served a long jail term for a criminal offence, if you have since matured to the point that you would not now consciously commit any crime? How does the knowledge that a current senior judicial officer was, in an earlier earth-life, a hardened criminal help the officer or those who appear before him?

In Chapter 3, we stressed the point that what matters is what we are *now,* not what we were in the *past*, nor what we intend to be in the future. We should strive constantly and strenuously to improve on our present. By so doing we would, in accordance with the Will of the Almighty, be helped along towards Paradise — the goal of our journey — no matter what we were in the past. There is great wisdom in the admonition: "*Live in the present."* And if we are permitted to know of a previous earth-life, we should not rest until we know what spiritual benefit for the present time we are meant to derive from the knowledge.

In summary, the answer to the question of recollection of past incarnations is in two parts. First, some people certainly do recall events of their past lives. Such recollections are spiritual experiences and are not initiated in the brain. It is, therefore, wrong to assume that nobody remembers. Second, most people do not need to remember particular incidents of any of their past lives. Everything they need from such earlier lives has already become part and parcel of their personalities, their strengths, weaknesses, propensities, etc.

The Apparent Population Paradox

In examining the logic of reincarnation, some people raise the issue of population growth. Their reasoning goes like this: Reincarnation implies that the same human spirits (albeit in different bodies) return to the earth. If this is the case, one might expect that the population on earth should remain the same or even decline as some human spirits move on to Paradise and thus cease to return to the earth. But this is not the case. Indeed, for several thousand years, the earth has witnessed steady growth in population. And in recent decades, this growth has become exponential. Does this not put a question mark on the validity of reincarnation?

The question is both important and interesting for it gives us the opportunity

to contemplate the structure of Creation and man's journey through it. In earlier Chapters, we stressed the fact that Creation consists of many regions or realms. We implied that the so-called "Beyond" should be understood as those regions (not just one) that are inaccessible to man's five physical senses.

For the sake of simplicity, we may divide Creation into the following five sections in descending order as we move away from the Divine Realm (which has existed from all eternity) to the earth:

- Primordial Creation (the first and original creation);
- Spiritual Creation (which includes Paradise, the origin of human spirits);
- Animistic Creation (which includes the origin of animal souls);
- Ethereal Material Creation; and
- Gross Material Creation (which includes our earth).

Each of these five sections has many sub-divisions. The Gross Material Creation, for example, includes the astral world that is frequently mentioned by occultists; the astral plane may be said to belong to medium Gross Matter. Many human spirits who leave the earth do not, in fact, get as far as the Ethereal Material Creation before again reincarnating on earth. The Material Creations (Ethereal Matter and Gross Matter), unlike the other parts of Creation, can suffer disintegration.

Please note that God, the Creator, is outside Creation. The relationship between Him and His Creation is rather like that between the artist and his art. The artist stands beside his work, although aspects of him may be reflected in the work.

The human being sets out as an unconscious spirit germ from Spiritual Creation and journeys through the intervening regions of Animistic Creation and Ethereal Material Creation to the World of Gross Matter. When it has acquired self-consciousness and sufficient maturity, it returns to Spiritual Creation and becomes a full member of the community there. Where the human spirit finds itself at any point in time during its long existence depends on how much progress it has made or how far it has gone off course.

First it should be understood that the unconscious spirit germs did not all leave Spiritual Creation on the journey to the earth at the same time. For millennia, a continuous stream of spirit germs left for the earth and had their first earthly incarnations. Therefore, during that period, the human population on earth was bound to increase. Subsequently, new incarnations on earth were joined by reincarnations, and after a certain stage, *first* incarnations were no longer possible. Following this epoch, all incarnations were and are reincarnations. Fresh spirit germs still stream out of Paradise, but they go to other "earths". And yet the population on our earth continues to increase! Below is the explanation.

Consider a set of human spirit-germs leaving Spiritual Creation for the earth. In accordance with their volitions they will stay for shorter or longer periods in the intervening sub-regions of the Ethereal Creation. Therefore, they will not arrive on earth simultaneously. Extend this simple reasoning to large numbers of human spirit-germs leaving the Spiritual Creation for the earth at various times. It becomes clear that the population on earth at any given point in time is *not* the total population of human spirit-germs that started on the journey from Spiritual Creation to the earth. Many are in the various parts of the Beyond between the earth and Spiritual Creation.

Indeed, the human population on earth is only a small fraction of the total population of human spirits that journeyed as unconscious spirit germs from Paradise towards the earth. The vast majority are to be found in the various subdivisions of the Gross Material Creation and Ethereal Material Creation. It is to these parts that human souls go at death; the particular part being determined by the three Laws discussed in Chapter 9: the Law of Attraction of Similar Species; the Law of Sowing and Reaping; and the Law of Spiritual Gravity.

For a long time now, human spirits have been looking away from the Spiritual Realm, have barred themselves from or missed the road to Paradise. They are hanging around at various points in the immediate Beyond. There is no steady flow of human spirits from the earth to the Spiritual Realm. Some are standing still, some are making U-turns, some are confused and cannot make up their minds whether and where to move, some are going in the

wrong directions because of misplaced signposts, and many have totally forgotten that they are on a journey. Only a tiny fraction can still see the way and still have the strength and the courage to travel on it onward to Paradise. Such clear-sighted ones may appear queer and be objects of ridicule to other persons who imagine they know better.

In addition to this chaos in which are engulfed millions of human souls who may even be considered well-meaning, there are huge sections of the Beyond in which reside the wicked, the licentious, the murderous, and the villainous. These sections have come into existence because men have wrongly exercised their Free Will through their thoughts, words, and deeds. The sections came into being automatically in accordance with the Law of Homogeneity and the Law of Spiritual Gravity. The inhabitants of these sections of the Beyond cannot proceed to Paradise and they form a large potential reservoir for additional populations on earth. However, they can only be drawn to the earth to swell human populations if people provide the bridge; that is, if there are persons on earth who are like those in such depraved and evil sections or whose longings are, if only occasionally, like those of the dwellers in these forsaken regions. And what do we find on earth today? There is a preponderance of misguided choices, evil thoughts, deceitful words, and wicked actions.

The lack of earnestness in regard to procreation, the purposelessness and indifference of sexual acts that lead to pregnancies must also be noted. These permit base human souls from the evil sections mentioned above to incarnate on earth. These are souls that do not belong to the earth in the normal course of events. No one should be surprised that they have no understanding for the spiritual purpose of life and that to them any means (deceit, lying, cheating, robberies, bigotry, terrorist acts, etc.) justify their base earthly objectives.

Many persons on earth have thus formed strong points of attraction for the billions residing in the evil sections of the Beyond. And, therefore, the potential reservoir in the Beyond has become an active source of supply of additional incarnating spirits on earth. Once on earth, such souls also attract more of their own type from parts that should normally be closed to the earth. This phenomenon accounts for a large proportion of population growth. Men have, through careless living and indifference to spiritual knowledge, opened

Pandora's Box and unleashed all sorts of undesirable characters on the world.

Furthermore, many souls that are not necessarily evil have become earthbound because of their propensities for material things and material pleasures that are obtainable only on earth. Such propensities prevent them from striding on to Paradise. They are constantly drawn back to the earth to pursue their propensities thereby swelling the earth's population.

In short then, the population question is answered by the fact that there are huge populations of human spirits in the various sections of the immediate Beyond. How many are on earth at any given time depends both on the volitions and tendencies of those in the Beyond as well as the spiritual environment of the earth.

We may liken the earth to a stadium and the Ethereal and Gross Material parts of Creation as the large city in which the stadium is located. Even when the most popular and most prestigious teams are engaged in a match at the stadium, only a relatively small fraction of the total city population would be in the stadium. The proportion in the stadium would fluctuate depending on such factors as the kind of game being played, the teams involved, the ease of access into the stadium, the gate fees, the weather, and so on. But at any point in time most dwellers of the city would not be in the stadium. In like manner, there are, at any point in time, many times more human spirits in the Ethereal and Gross Material sections of Creation than on earth. Just as the population of the stadium swells under certain circumstances, so can the population of the earth increase depending on the situation on earth.

There is in our time another very important factor at work. The material worlds are being purified in preparation for the Millennium — a period of a thousand years during which the Will of God will reign supreme, ensuring peace and rapid spiritual and material progress. To enforce the purification, there is a much increased outpouring of spiritual power into our part of Creation. It is this unusual inflow of spiritual power into the material worlds that will bring about the tremendous changes that must occur before the reign of the Almighty can be established on earth. One of the effects of the spiritual outpouring is the quickening of all happenings in Creation and the acceleration of all cycles to a rapid close. All that is slumbering is stimulated

into activity. Hence, the unprecedented changes and acceleration of events both man-made and natural that we witness on earth these days.

Those in the Beyond who, according to the Laws of Creation, must come to the earth are being compelled to do so rapidly. And where opportunities exist (and opportunities abound because of prevailing sexual permissiveness) they reincarnate, and swell populations on earth. Thus, a rapidly increasing population is absolutely consistent with belief in reincarnation.

In general, the population of the earth would decline quite considerably if earthmen were to develop much greater longing for Paradise, become less materialistic and much nobler in their thoughts, words, and deeds. By so doing, dwellers of the evil sections of the Beyond would be barred from incarnating on earth while the noble ones ascend away from the earth towards Paradise. A significant factor to be taken into account is the purification of the World of Matter including the earth which is now being enforced by an increased outpouring of spiritual power into Creation. The disasters and catastrophes accompanying this purification process are bound to decimate the population of the earth and will effectively put an end to the further incarnation of human spirits of evil volition. Thus, in the long run, the population of the earth will decline.

A Reincarnation Study by a Population Scientist

A demonstration of the consistency of reincarnation with increasing population on earth has also been done empirically by a professional population scientist. Since the scientific approach would be of special interest to those of a scientific or intellectual bend, the study and its results are outlined in the following paragraphs. The population scientist, David Bishai, at the Department of Population and Family Health Sciences of the John Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, USA carried out an elaborate demographic study of whether or not the observed growth in human population invalidates the idea of reincarnation. The study was published in year 2000 in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (Volume 14: 411-420). His study shows that population growth on earth is consistent with reincarnation.

The author assumes that there are only two states in which the human being can exist – incarnate or discarnate; that is, with or without the body. The two

states may also be thought of as existence on earth and existence in the Beyond. He used the best scientifically validated sources to estimate that human beings of the species *Homo sapiens* came into existence around 50,000 B.C. With the year 50,000 B.C. as the starting point it is estimated that the total number of human beings that have ever been born on earth is about 105 billion. Making assumptions about historical human life-spans and mortality patterns, demographers estimate that of the 105 billion humans that ever lived, roughly 17 billion human lives would have ended before attaining the age of one and 30 billion lives would have terminated before age 15.

The author used estimated or actual crude birth and death rates for four periods: 50,000 B.C.; 4000 B.C.; 1650 A.D.; and 2000 A.D. He likened passage from the earth to the Beyond and vice versa to migration of human beings between two places. He applied a theoretical demographic model called the Circular Migration Model to calculate the populations in the Beyond as well as the minimum stay in the Beyond for a given life-span on earth and for three assumed combined populations of both the earth and the Beyond (10 billion, 20 billion, and 100 billion). The average lifespan on earth was estimated at 29 years in both 50,000 B.C. and 4000 B.C.; it was 33 years in 1650 A.D., and 71 years in 2000 A.D. The human populations on earth during the four periods were estimated as 5 million, 7 million, 500 million, and 6 billion, respectively.

The data showed that regardless of the assumed value of the population of the earth plus that of the Beyond, growth in the population of the earth is consistent with reincarnation. The study showed that as population on earth *increases*, the average length of stay of a human spirit in the Beyond before it reincarnates on earth *decreases*. On the other hand, for a given population on earth, the average stay in the Beyond increases with increasing assumed combined population of the earth and the Beyond. Thus, if the combined population was assumed to be 10 billion and the earth's population only 5 million, the average interval between incarnations would be about 57,000 years and would decrease to 30 years as the earth's population increased to 6 billion. If the combined population were to be put at 20 billion of which only 5 million were on earth, the average interval between incarnations would be about 114,000 years and would decrease to 106 years as the population of the earth increased to 6 billion. This means, according to the study, that the

average interval between reincarnations has been decreasing.

Ian Stevenson, the foremost research scientist on reincarnation, had argued that changes in the interval between incarnations could reconcile reincarnation with population growth. The basic result of this demographic study confirms Stevenson's argument.

Comments on the Study

The study states that demographers estimate that the number of human beings that have ever been born on earth is about 105 billion. But of this number, as many as 17 billion did not live beyond one year. This means that 16 percent, about one out of every six, of those who have ever lived had a lifespan of one year or less – a rather large proportion. And about 30 billion, nearly 30 percent of all who have ever been born on earth, did not live past 15 years. In the scheme of reincarnation, that would not matter much as the spirits involved might have had earlier and longer earth-lives; or would have since had long earth-lives, or could expect to have future chances for long earth-lives.

It is a different matter if one rejects reincarnation. The creative process would be quite an inefficient one; it would be characterized by colossal waste and intolerable injustice, if each human being were specially created at birth and for only one earth-life, as implied by rejection of reincarnation. On reflecting on this fact alone, it would seem to me that to reject reincarnation is to charge the Creator with gross inefficiency.

The author's model correctly indicates that there is a large reservoir of human souls in the discarnate state from which the earth may draw additional population. On assuming a combined population of 100 billion for the earth and the Beyond, the model locates as many as 94 billion in the Beyond; for a combined population of 20 billion, 14 billion are in the Beyond. According to the population experts working for the United Nations, the population of the earth is expected to peak at about 10 billion. This study suggests that there are more than enough souls in the Beyond from which additional souls could be drawn to accommodate further population growth on earth. However, as already mentioned, given the current and projected conditions on earth including the fact of spiritual purification, it is rather likely that the peak

human population will be less, perhaps much less, than 10 billion.

The author of the demographic study assumed that all human beings who are not in the flesh are in one common and singular discarnate state. What he calls the discarnate state is what is generally designated as the Beyond. The Beyond, however, is not just one state but consists of several distinct sections. Understandably, a basically good soul will not find itself in the same section of the Beyond as a depraved one. Some sections of the Beyond are occupied by souls that no longer need to incarnate on earth and other sections by souls who are largely barred from incarnation because of their very base nature. For this reason, one should not make too much of the average intervals in the Beyond as calculated by the author; a meaningful average should relate to a well-defined section of the Beyond. However, it is in general true that by far the greater part of the existence of each human spirit is spent in the Beyond. The author of the book, "*In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message, explains:

> Man must never forget that he stands in the *work* of God, that he himself is part of this work, and thus unconditionally subject to its laws!
>
> The work, however, not only embraces things visible to the physical eye but also the Ethereal World, in which the greatest part of man's actual existence and activity takes place. His occasional lives on earth are only small sections of it, *nevertheless always great turning points.*
>
> Birth on earth only forms the beginning of a special section in a man's entire existence, but not the beginning of man himself. (Paragraphs are from the Lecture "The Mystery of Birth" in Volume II).

As stated in my earlier explanations, spiritual events of cosmic proportions can be expected to influence specific incarnations on earth. The earth occupies a special place for human spirits because it is the meeting point for human spirits of diverse levels of maturity and different stages of development. Thus on earth, the most highly developed human beings can come into contact with the most depraved; the most knowledgeable may get together with the quite ignorant; good and bad people may find themselves

sitting at a stadium watching the same match. Such meetings and interactions are not possible in other planes of existence.

For the above reason, life on earth ought to be most highly valued. We should take full advantage of every earth-life to learn and to experience through our interactions with others so that we may achieve personal spiritual development and growth. We should also strive to use the opportunities of such meetings and interactions to offer help, especially such help as would advance the spiritual maturing of all those with whom we come into contact. The physical cloaks, which all earthmen possess, make such meetings possible; but after physical death, the Law of Attraction of Homogeneous Species acts on us in a more pronounced manner and ensures separation of the mature from the immature, the wise, from the foolish, the spiritually indolent from the active and living.

CHAPTER 12. TROUBLING SOCIAL ISSUES CLARIFIED THROUGH REINCARNATION

If in the course of thousands of years men had not always acted as they still do today, if they had not time and again distorted everything that was intended to help them in order to adapt it to their own human way of thinking and their earthly desires, there would now be only one uniform teaching here on earth, issuing from the Will of God. There would not be so many kinds of denominations.
(Abd-ru-shin, Author of In the Light of Truth, The Grail Message)

Thus all earthmen are of the same origin. The only difference between them is to be sought in the spiritual development and maturity, which lies with each human spirit personally on account of its free will. Only when looked at in this way does one arrive at the right "standpoint" for harmonious co-operation between all the races and peoples: They should not stand above and below one another, but side by side.

(Herbert Vollmann in his book, A Gate Opens, essay entitled *"The Origin of Man and the Human Races"*)

23 23 23
11 11 11

I demonstrated in Chapter 10 how reincarnation deepens our understanding of the Bible and leads us to a greater appreciation of its immense spiritual value. I did so by reference to the story of Esau and Jacob and two specific Bible passages — one from the New Testament and the other from the Old Testament. But the right conception of reincarnation clarifies not only the Scriptures and related matters. It also clarifies many other issues. Ian Stevenson, the foremost scientific researcher on reincarnation, presents evidence that reincarnation has "considerable explanatory value for several

features of human personality and biology that current accepted theories do not adequately clarify" (*The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 164, No. 5, pp. 305-325). Specifically, he stated:

> The idea of reincarnation may contribute to an improved understanding of such diverse matters as: phobias and philias of childhood; skills not learned in early life; abnormalities of child-parent relationships; vendettas and bellicose nationalism; childhood sexuality and gender identity confusion; birthmarks, congenital deformities, and internal diseases; differences between members of monozygotic twin pairs; and abnormal appetites during pregnancy."

The objective of this Chapter is to show how reincarnation clarifies some key social issues, many of which should be of concern to all Christians who wish genuinely to attune their thinking, words, and actions to the Will of the Creator.

Racism as a Consequence of Spiritual Poverty

In Chapter 9, while discussing the Law of Homogeneity (also called the Law of Attraction of Similar Species), I remarked that superficial persons, those who do not have any understanding for the inner and finer qualities, would be attracted most readily only by outward appearances such as skin color, physical looks, fashion, nationality, etc. With growing spiritual maturity, a person finds that he/she *automatically* (and almost unconsciously) attaches less importance to such outward characteristics.

Note, however, that academic distinctions, intellectual sophistication, cultivated social graces, or earthly power do not necessarily imply spiritual maturity. Indeed, the high incidences of unabashed lying, deception and cheating as well as various forms and extents of corruption among persons of considerable academic achievements and members of political, social, and business elites around the world amply demonstrate this point. Neither should it be imagined that a person has attained spiritual maturity just because he/she has chosen a full-time career in religion; nor on account of a person's high standing and office within a religious organization or spiritual movement.

Because most people on earth today are superficial and materialistic, the

predominant factors of homogeneity are trivial and unprofound. This is the explanation for the undue importance given to race, ethnicity, tribe, and nationality in virtually all societies. And this situation has in turn led to the grave problems of racism, “ethnic cleansing” (such as happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina) tribalism, and nationalism. This Chapter shows how reincarnation throws light on these issues and thereby helps us to form the right attitudes.

Racism is one of the most troubling issues facing the world today. Undoubtedly, it has been a great scourge and remains one of the worst evils in the history of humankind. The black race and the Jews (victims of both religious and racial prejudice) have been the most publicized victims. It is said that as many as six million Jews were killed in Adolf Hitler’s Germany. Black people were taken into slavery in huge numbers and they continue to suffer indignities in various parts of the world including, in some instances, in their own homelands. They were victims of officially sanctioned, indiscriminate murders at different times and in various places. But some races have even fared worse than black people and the Jews; certain races have been virtually exterminated by other races that had superior military might but inferior morals. Even today, the continued existence of certain so-called indigenous peoples, for example, in the Amazon, is under threat.

Christianity has not always played a noble role on the race question. It is sadly true that certain Christians have attempted to justify racism by reference to the Bible, citing the case of Gibeonites reported in the Bible as having been made “hewers of wood and drawers of water” by Joshua (Joshua 9:1-27). As the story goes, the Gibeonites deceptively got Joshua and the people of Israel to enter into a kind of peace treaty with them; their representatives stated that their land was far away from the Israelites, whereas it was near. The apologists of racism claim that some people are descendants of the Gibeonites who are predestined to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” It should be obvious that this incident is far from being a justification for slavery and racism; for one thing, slavery predates this incident. The fact that racism is in direct opposition to love and justice (two attributes that Christians should strive for) does not seem to bother those who believe in the concept of some being arbitrarily destined to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” The bad record of Christianity and other groups on the

race question is attributable to, among other reasons, a lack of understanding of the spiritual relationship among races and the lack of inner conviction of the Justice of God, neither of which can be achieved without the knowledge of reincarnation.

At this point, two remarks should be made. One is that whatever is said about racism applies equally to feelings of superiority, discrimination, and injustices based on ethnic differences within the same race. In some parts of the world tribal or ethnic differences lead to tensions and problems that are sometimes more serious than those caused by racism. In this connection, we need cite only the case of the tribes of Europe and, in particular, the events of 1992 and 1993 in Bosnia Herzegovina. From a spiritual standpoint, racism and tribalism have similar origins. A second remark is that one should note that the victims of racism are just as ignorant about the origins of race as their oppressors. And so, many members of oppressed races and tribes do not know what to make of their own conditions.

In modern times, the hatred of Jews has been the result of envy of their material successes and of views as to how those successes were achieved. But hatred of Jewish people had its historical origins in the popular belief among European Christians that the Jews should be considered collectively responsible for the killing of Jesus Christ. It resulted in a mythology that showed Jews as child slaughterers and people who poisoned wells from which others drew drinking water. Martin Luther (1483-1546) is famous for his role in the Protestant Reformation and in the development of the German language through his translation of the Bible into German. Most readers would be shocked to learn that he was not above racial prejudice; he was anti-Semitic. He described Jews as ‘a brood of vipers’, presumably based on what John the Baptist was reported by Matthew to have said about the Pharisees and the Sadducees nearly 1,500 years earlier (Matthew 3:7). Martin Luther thought that Jews should all be driven from Germany. He felt so strongly about the ‘Jewish question’ that he wrote a book with the title *On the Jews and Their Lies*. The anti-Semitism of the past culminated in the Holocaust in the 20th Century. The direct role of some Christian churches in this affair is exemplified by the case of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Linz in Austria who, in a pastoral letter written in 1933, called on the so-called faithful to halt the spread of “the Jewish spirit” in Austrian culture.

During that period, the German author of the work *"In the Light of Truth"*, The Grail Message condemned anti-Semitism pointing out that there was no basis for the arrogance that Christians assumed towards Jews. He reminded Christians that Jesus was a Jew, that the Disciples were Jews, that Christianity is based on Judaism, that Christianity can record only Jewish Prophets of the Old Testament, and that the Ten Commandments came through a Jew. Happily, although belatedly, the position of the Church changed in 1964 when it officially renounced the view that Jews be held collectively responsible for the murder of Jesus. Christianity, if it is to have a future, must change in such a way that its officials and its doctrines will never again have a hand, even indirectly, in anything like the Holocaust. The right change would call for greater spiritualization that involves explicit acceptance of the Perfection of God, His Love and His Justice as well as a greater understanding of and commitment to the immutable Divine Laws, which were outlined in Chapter 9.

Some Remarks on Races

How should we think about races? We should recognize the following facts:

First, it is the Will of God that there be many races, not just one race, on earth. The diversity of races is simply one example of the diversity that is a common feature of nature. Natural diversity is crucial to the very survival of all inhabitants of the earth, including plants, animals, and human beings.

The second fact is that every race has unique strengths and virtues that it can contribute to the spiritual well-being and development of humankind as a whole. Each race should be allowed and helped to develop its unique potentials and each race should joyfully learn from the others.

Third, the innermost core of all races is the same — the human spirit. That is, all human beings, regardless of race belong to the same spiritual family. Members of all races all started off from the spiritual plane as unconscious spirit-germs and journeyed to the material planes in search of spiritual maturity. On successful completion of the journey, they all return to the same home, the spiritual plane (Paradise) as self-conscious, mature spirits. All those that fail, end up in the same funnel of disintegration and suffer the same

fate.

The essential difference between various races is only in the physical body, the outermost cloak of the spirit. This is really saying that the differences among the races may be likened, for example, to a number of persons belonging to the same race but wearing dress suits of different colors. The man wearing the dark suit can be considered appropriately dressed for a church worship. The man in the white cocktail jacket, while properly dressed for a grand social reception, would be considered inappropriately dressed for Sunday worship in the church or for a business meeting. Each suit has its advantage and its purpose; it would be wrong to consider one as superior or inferior to the other.

Reincarnation and Race

Another recognition we must have is that, in the course of its existence, a given human spirit may, at different times, reincarnate among different races and in different parts of the world. For some human spirits, the variety of experiences they need for their spiritual maturing can only be acquired as members of several races in different earth-lives. This is also true for nationality. We have noted that the family and the part of the world in which a soul incarnates are governed by the Law of Homogeneity (Like Attracts Like) and the Law of Sowing and Reaping. Depending on the particular circumstances of a human being, these laws may act in such a way that he/she reincarnates among different races in successive earth-lives. It is, in fact, not unreasonable to expect that a person who harbors really intense feelings (of hatred or love) for a particular race may be compelled by the Law of Sowing and Reaping to reincarnate among that race.

A detailed examination of the various possibilities is outside the scope of this book. I simply want to make the point that many human beings who are today living as members of one race once lived as members of a different race. Thus, for example, many members of the Caucasoid race living on earth today once lived as Negroes, and similarly, many black people on earth today were white individuals in earlier earth-lives. Moreover, our racial identity in our next incarnation is very much an open question. Therefore, the knowledge of reincarnation suggests that we too often exaggerate the importance of our current racial identities.

Moreover, reincarnation throws light on what our attitude towards other races should be in the following manner: We become aware of the fact that whatever we as individuals do to promote the welfare or suppress the development of a particular race, we do only for or to ourselves. There are two reasons for this: we may in a future earth-life reincarnate among that race and become direct beneficiaries or victims of our present actions; and regardless of where we reincarnate, the Law of Sowing and Reaping ensures that any actions of ours genuinely intended to promote other people's welfare will return to us multiplied and, similarly, any deliberate wrong we do to others will eventually boomerang on us.

Jews and Jesus Christ

Finally, let us return to the Jewish question. It should by now be evident that the notion that the Jewish people incarnated on earth in our time should be held responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ is ridiculous. As has been explained repeatedly, reincarnation can and does take place across racial, tribal, national, gender, and religious boundaries. Many of the human spirits who were Jewish during Adolf Hitler's rule might not even have been on earth at the time of Jesus Christ. Those of them who were on earth then could have been ardent followers of Jesus and, therefore, not only did they have nothing to do with the Crucifixion, they could themselves have been victims, like the first disciples and apostles.

Moreover, it is possible that some of the Christians who in the 20th Century persecuted Jews were themselves Jews in earlier earth-lives and might even have been involved in the murder of Jesus. In Chapter 8, we discussed the case of Therese Neumann (1898-1962) who was stigmatized because of her ignoble role as "the thief on the cross" during the Crucifixion of Jesus. Therese Neumann reincarnated as a German Catholic and as a woman; that is, an Israelite male unbeliever of the time of Jesus did reincarnate in recent times as a female German Catholic Christian. This is a case in which nationality, religion, and gender changed in different incarnations.

To underscore the point I am trying to make, let me quote from the response of Abd-ru-shin, the author of the work *"In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message* to the statement amplifying a question by a seeker (who obviously

did not know the mechanism of reincarnation). The seeker wrote: “If stigmatizations are supposed in part to be karmic effects, then surely these should only occur among the Jewish people, who crucified Christ at that time.” Abd-ru-shin’s response included the following:

> Reincarnations do not depend on adherence to some religion, but solely on the maturity of the spirit, as well as on the characteristics that cling to it, which it has therefore acquired, or which it bears with it. …
>
> Therefore among present-day Jews many former Christians are reincarnated, as also very many former Jews among the present-day Christians. Religious barriers are purely earthly, as is also nationality. A happening such as reincarnation does not halt before these barriers erected by the human mind, because these barriers or boundaries are not inwardly alive, and are of no importance in world events. In reality, these are only small insignificant things, which the little earthman alone considers important and great for the sake of … earthly influence! Nothing more.
>
> A Christian is very often a Jew in his next life on earth, only to be a Christian again later, and vice versa; naturally also it is just the same with adherents of other religions. Sex is also immaterial. It changes, or remains as it is, according to the development of the nature of the characteristics or the “propensity”. (Abd-ru-shin, *Questions and Answers,* pp. 117-118)

Religious fanaticism has taken, and continues to take, a heavy toll around the world. It has resulted in violent conflicts and remains a major threat to the socio-political and economic stability of many countries. No matter from what angle we consider it, religious fanaticism is detrimental to the search for spiritual knowledge and is against the Will of the Creator. It is poverty of spiritual knowledge that makes a person a religious fanatic. Let us emphasize that whatever we hold to be our religion or sect in this earth-life may have been totally different from our religious affiliations in earlier earth-lives. Some may, in fact, now be fighting to destroy sects that they themselves helped to establish or that they fanatically promoted in previous earth-lives. Fanatics are detrimental to truth and spiritual progress.

What is important for the human spirit is the Truth, which is eternal and never changes, which revitalizes the spirit, and to which the undistorted teachings of all the Envoys and genuine messengers of God lead. It is for this reason that the core teachings underlying the major religions are the same. It is said that "Truth is the Gift, whereas Religion is the Gift wrapping." But people, unfortunately, forget the Truth and focus on the gift wrapping. Moreover, it is also the case that religion has a tendency to distort the original teachings (the gift) and, therefore, unlike ordinary wrappings, religion taints the gift. We should all understand that there is no religion higher than Truth!

Measuring Relative Contributions

Reincarnation also cautions us against superficial assessments of the relative contributions to world civilization by different races. Today, people of the Western world and their ancestors (primarily Europeans and North Americans) are assumed to have done the most to advance world civilization. Others, particularly Africans and some non-Western peoples in general, are thought to have contributed little or nothing of significance, and it is, therefore, thought justifiable to look down on them.

But in the world-picture that is unfolded to us through reincarnation we can see clearly that this analysis is much too superficial, too simplistic. This is because many people who are today incarnated as Africans, Arabs or as Asians were in earlier earth-lives Europeans or North Americans. Therefore, they have direct claims to the glories of "western" civilization. Indeed, human spirits who today are not incarnated in western societies may have made some of the great technological and cultural contributions, which today are regarded as the hallmarks of western civilization. It is, moreover, possible that some among those who today are Europeans or Americans are incarnated there only for the first time; that is, their earlier incarnations were among non-western races. Thus, the claims of such people to western civilization can be considered rather tenuous; certainly not as valid as purely earthly thinking might suggest.

From the spiritual standpoint, it is pointless comparing the past achievements of one race or nationality with those of another. Such comparisons are usually made by those who think that their own race, nationality or ethnic group has

done better than others. This is truly meaningless in the light of reincarnation. The thought is, of course, borne of vanity; a weakness that we must all strive to overcome. Moreover, the fact that one's current race or nation has made great contributions does not mean that one has not been a woeful failure *personally*. In other words, if you must compare, do so on a personal level. Ask what *you* have *personally* achieved in relation to other individuals. You would quickly find the need for humility. For, a very small proportion of humanity is responsible for the great achievements. The vast majority of us human beings cannot lay claim to anything of real and lasting significance.

Let us also repeat here that we should not live in the past. We should live in the present and, therefore, ask what we are contributing *now*; not what we achieved in the past. It follows that instead of bemoaning the past and blaming colonialists and imperialists, the peoples of the less developed world should bestir themselves, work and learn really hard, face their present situations courageously so that they may improve their own circumstances. They should identify and develop vigorously areas where they have comparative advantage, not only for their own well-being but also so that they can contribute to the welfare of human beings elsewhere in the world.

Furthermore, one should remark that the lack of development among some races is due not only to the failings or inabilities of the human beings now incarnated among those races. All those who have ever incarnated among those races must share the blame — and these include some people currently incarnated among races that live in highly developed parts of the earth. Those responsible for the injustices of the global and national economic systems, which work against those who need the most help must also share in the blame.

It is remarkable that the most materially underdeveloped areas of the earth are confined largely to the non-temperate regions, especially the humid tropical zone. Indeed, the temperate zone has been described as the normal zone. In the temperate zone, Mother Nature has "four children" — Spring, Summer, Autumn (or Fall), and Winter; in the tropics, she has only two children — dry season and wet (or rainy) season! Some geographers and other analysts have noted the striking correlation between tropical climatic conditions and underdevelopment, even within the same country. As one moves away from

the temperate zone, development becomes increasingly difficult.

Consider the following ecological fact: In the tropics, (especially the humid tropical areas) agricultural pest populations multiply all the year round, whereas their populations are decimated during the winter months of the temperate regions. For this reason, agricultural production and activities related to farming are much more difficult in the tropics than in temperate areas. Similarly, organisms, which cause human and animal diseases, multiply continuously in tropical regions making public health and animal husbandry a lot more problematic. It would, therefore, seem more reasonable to consider the non-temperate zones, particularly the humid tropical zone, as areas presenting especially difficult challenges, rather than judge the races that inhabit them as somehow inferior. Humankind should collectively face up to these difficult challenges. This is because, among other reasons, it is the right thing to do. And these regions could be the sites of future incarnation for many who now live in temperate, developed areas.

The Global Village

Developments in communication technologies, mobile phones, the Internet and email, mass media (particularly radio and television), air travel, and the increased linkages among the economies of many countries have demonstrated that this earth is really a very small place, a global village. We are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the fates of the different races and nationalities are linked together in complex ways. The knowledge of reincarnation greatly reinforces this awareness. It shows that we need not regard any race as alien and that it is in our interest to work for the advancement of all races. We are members of one spiritual family journeying through the global village called earth, an inconceivably immense distance from Paradise which is our real and common home.

The worldview indicated to us by reincarnation is one in which it is pointless and, indeed, misleading and incorrect, for any one race to claim exclusive credits for past achievements in any given part of the world. Similarly, no race should be blamed exclusively for any failings or atrocities. For example, it is possible, even likely, that some of the white slave traders are today incarnated as black Africans. Thus, we might have the ludicrous situation of a black man vehemently condemning white people for the atrocities of the

slave trade, whereas he was an active participant in the despicable trade during an earlier earth-life in which he was a white man. The achievements and failures of the past should be considered the common heritage and responsibility of all humankind. I should again emphasize that all that has been stated about race applies to ethnic or tribal groups. And the conclusions are the same.

Nationalism

Nationalism has, in our time, been another cause of tension and wars. Since reincarnation carries human spirits across national borders, the nationality one holds today is not the only nationality one has had in one's continuous spiritual existence. One has had many nationalities. Some individuals have had recollections of their past earth-lives, which occurred in different countries and regions of the world. What has been said about race applies to nationality.

The nation you may be planning to destroy or subvert may be your destination in your next earth-life, or may be one you helped to build in a previous earth-life. Unfortunately, so-called national interests, considered only from purely earthly and materialistic perspectives, are today promoted as the basis for the relationship among nations. The unstated assumption and the implication are that the interests of other nations are not our business and should hardly concern us. Even though there is an increasing awareness that the earth has become like a village in which all nations are neighbors, quite illogically "national interest" (not "global interest" or "mutual interest") remains the basis on which international relations are conducted.

The knowledge of reincarnation should remind us that many of the countries we may wish to oppose or cheat were ours before and we may still be obliged to live in them again. A nation's apparent success in pursuit of selfish interests at the expense of other nations will through the mechanism of the Law of Reciprocal Action eventually haunt and hurt it. The increasing problems of so-called illegal immigration are only a small and initial harvest of past misguided actions in international economic and political relations. We must suppress nationalism and do away with the wrong attitude captured in the expression "my country, right or wrong". We need to formulate a new and spiritually sound basis to guide the relationship among nations. Justice

and Love towards all human beings form the essential starting point. A conviction about reincarnation and the Law of Sowing and Reaping facilitate our appreciation that our current concepts of selfish national interests, paradoxically, go against our true self-interests, which lie in spiritual maturing and personal ennoblement.

Reincarnation and Gender

Let me also make the point here that reincarnation does help throw new light on the matter of gender confusion and homosexuality and cautions against hasty conclusions by scientists, religious leaders, and the general public. I have already remarked that, depending on individual circumstances, a person's gender may change from one incarnation to the next although the gender of the human spirit (the real person) does not change. In other words, what changes is the physical cloak. Thus, a male human spirit would normally incarnate in a male physical body and a female human spirit would ordinarily incarnate in a female physical body. However, if a human being on earth cultivates the characteristics and tendencies of the opposite sex, he/she may acquire the physical body of that opposite sex in his/her next incarnation.

Researchers, including Prof. Ian Stevenson, have investigated and published many cases in which gender change in successive incarnations occurred. In each of such cases, the person as a child showed traits characteristic of the opposite sex. For example, a male child who was a female in the immediate past incarnation would show partiality for the female clothes and would generally prefer female plays and female activities. In most cases, such initial "wrong-gender" tendencies gradually disappear and are replaced by behavior appropriate to the current gender. But some of them tenaciously retain their "wrong-gender" behavior; among such are those who might take drastic action later in life, such as requesting sex change.

It should be expected that male human spirits in female physical bodies and female human spirits in male physical bodies would show signs of confusion about their gender identity. They may also be expected to experience inner turmoil, which the rest of society would not understand. Because their inner identity is at variance with their outer appearance and because societal expectations depend on their outer appearance, such cases must give rise to

social problems, including gender confusion and behavior contrary to conventional gender roles.

A male spirit in a female physical body might in some cases have the feelings of a male and might be attracted to another person in a female body, possibly given rise to a lesbian relationship. Conversely, a female spirit in a male physical body might think and feel female and be attracted to a person in a male physical body, which might lead to a “gay” relationship. It should, however, be stated that not all male spirits incarnated in female bodies have lesbian tendencies, neither do all female spirits incarnated in male bodies have gay inclinations. But in a sexually permissive environment, restraint is cast away and those who might have struggled successfully to follow the path dictated by their current physical gender are less likely to do so. It is also the case that not all homosexual cases involve incarnation of the human spirit in a body of the opposite gender. A sexually permissive world encourages experimentation on the part of some people; such experimentation may lead them to gender confusion and homosexual lifestyles.

Once the reality of reincarnation and the spiritual nature of the human being are taken into account, discussion and debate on homosexuality, for and against, would be much deeper and much less acrimonious. All sides must recognize that the purpose of human existence is spiritual and, therefore, we ought to be guided by principles, policies, and actions that promote spiritual maturing thereby leading us back to our permanent home in Paradise.

Chapter 13. The Dawn of a New Christianity

A new era dawns, which will remove all doubts and permit the knowledge of God to arise anew in purer, more living raiment, which will not diminish the greatness of the sacrifice by the Son of God at that time, but will place it in an even more radiant light, because the human spirit will have become knowing about it, and will not merely continue in a state of vague belief about it, a belief that bears no living power within it.
(Abd-ru-shin, *Questions and Answers*, p.218)

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It is hoped that the foregoing chapters have explained how reincarnation should be understood, the mechanism of its working, its purpose, and its significance for humankind. It should also have become clear that, much more than many Christians imagine, reincarnation finds support in the Bible. Indeed, the deep spiritual meanings and lessons of certain passages in the Bible become clear and obvious only when they are interpreted within the framework of a belief in reincarnation.

Among the issues discussed were the various references to John the Baptist in relation to Elijah. The author of the Gospel according to Matthew appeared not only to have believed in reincarnation but also thought that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. Matthew's view in this regard explains why members of certain Christian sects believe that Elijah reincarnated as John the Baptist. This belief is explicitly stated in the introduction to the Old Testament Book of Malachi in a version of the Bible called *THE BOOK*, which is a special edition of *The Living Bible*. It states that Prophet Malachi *"ends his book with a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah and his forerunner, John the Baptist (called Elijah here)."* In other words, those responsible for producing THE BOOK version of *The Living Bible* share the belief that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. As discussed in Chapter 7, the belief in reincarnation implied in this statement is

correct; but both Matthew and those responsible for the above sentence in the introduction to Malachi might not be correct in declaring that Elijah reincarnated as John the Baptist.

A great deal of confusion about reincarnation often arises out of ignorance of the Divine Laws that govern it. These Laws (also called by various other names, including the Laws of Creation, the Eternal Laws, and the Laws of Life) are the same Laws that govern all processes in Creation. I have, therefore, outlined them and indicated how they guide reincarnation to ensure Divine Justice and Love. I should stress the overriding importance of these Laws and the absolute necessity for all human beings to study them closely and to adjust their lives according to their dictates. These Laws accord, of course, with the teachings of Christ as well as with the Ten Commandments. Indeed, by adjusting all our thoughts, words, and actions to the Divine Laws, we would automatically be obeying all the Ten Commandments.

Through the application of the Divine Laws and other knowledge derived from the work *"In the Light of Truth," The Grail Message*, I have answered the major questions people ask and responded to common concerns about reincarnation. Furthermore, I have demonstrated the value of reincarnation in clarifying troubling social and political issues. Armed with the knowledge of the Divine Laws and a belief in reincarnation Christians would be able to appraise correctly the great and complex issues of our time, and would be able to champion positions on the basis of absolute conviction. They would not be drawn into taking positions merely on account of ancient dogmas or because such positions appear respectable or opportune.

In the final analysis, each individual must decide for himself or herself what constitutes convincing argument in support of or sufficient proof of reincarnation. Some do not need any proofs because of the personal experiences they have had. Many potentially sufficient proofs have already been discussed. They include the pieces of non-biblical evidence outlined in Chapter 4, the support from various passages in the Bible, and the clarification of Bible passages which are otherwise difficult to understand.

For me, the most important support for reincarnation is the fact that reincarnation is the only scheme that is consistent with the Love and Justice

of the Creator as well as His Perfection and His lack of arbitrariness. In my humble view, sufficient reasons have been presented in the preceding Chapters for individual Christians to embrace reincarnation.

Either Progress or Retrogression

One of the Divine Laws which I did not discuss because it does not bear directly on reincarnation is the Law of Movement. It can be stated that all the Divine Laws which manifest the Will of God operate within the framework of the Law of Movement. Motion is a fundamental principle throughout Creation. The closer a plane of existence is to the summit of Creation (that is, the nearer it is to the Divine Realm) the more pronounced is the movement and the faster the pace of all activities and experiencing. It is for this reason that one day in Paradise is like a thousand years on earth (where movement is relatively very sluggish). This means that the experiences and activities that can be packed into one "Paradise day" would require on earth a thousand earth years.

The principle of adaptation with which biological scientists are so conversant is a consequence of the Law of Movement. There are birds which can no longer fly because their wings have deteriorated on account of failure to use them over thousands of years. And there are fishes which are obliged to stay at the bottom of the seas because they have lost their ability to withstand the currents. Progress, preservation, and restoration are achieved only through movement of the right kind. This applies to the world of ideas, belief systems and religions. The human spirit is subject to this same Law of Adaptation. The spiritually receptive part of the brain, the cerebellum, has become stunted relative to the intellectual part, the cerebrum, because human beings have busied themselves almost exclusively with gross material activities. Thus, we have lost, most of our spiritual abilities and hardly appreciate a spiritual outlook on life. This condition is responsible for many of the problems confronting the human race, and the dire problems which await many in the Beyond, after physical death.

On account of the Law of Movement, one should expect that revelations from the Creator would be progressive. Therefore, one should expect new knowledge and new revelations which advances older teachings at critical periods in the development of Creation. Without such new knowledge, there

would be stagnation and retrogression and advancement to the next higher level would be impossible. Without the periodic infusion of new spiritual knowledge the foundation of religious beliefs would gradually collapse. Many objective observers suspect that the major world religions are today in a situation of near collapse for lack of admission of the new spiritual knowledge which would solidify their foundations and raise their followers to the next level of spiritual awareness and convictions. Pertinent to this is the following statement of the author of the Grail Message:

> It is the most sacred duty of man to move *forward* in the recognition of God, as well as in his spiritual development. Any hindrance in this, and any shackling to what exists, is standstill, which brings retrogression in its wake. Scientific investigation and discovery through the intellect always advance steadily; if that through the spirit does not keep pace with it, it must in time be shaken violently and begin to waver, because the balance necessary for harmony between these two different species, which should go hand in hand, is lacking (Abd-ru-shin, *Questions and Answers*, pp. 201-202).

However, church traditions and dogmas have a very strong hold on many individual Christians. The hold is so strong that some are unwilling to drop dogmas and traditions that obviously cast doubt on the Love and Justice of God. In this connection, John M. Templeton in his book, *The Humble Approach: Scientists Discover God* (New York, Seabury Press, 1981), comments on the difference between scientists on the one hand and church authorities and theologians on the other. He states that scientists are, in general, ready to test and accept new ideas that support the foundation of science while throwing away inadequate theories and ideas that more recent evidence tends to discredit. But church authorities and theologians resent their pet ideas being challenged or criticized. In earlier, more barbaric days, religious authorities occasionally burned at the stake or crucified “upstarts” who claimed to have new revelations or alternative spiritual insights, even when such did not strike at the foundation of faith. “Why should men of God be less willing to listen sympathetically to new ideas than scientists?” asks Templeton.

Truth Cannot Be Suppressed Forever

Change, swift and baffling change is a characteristic of our times. Whether we are thinking of the weather, the economy, politics, public health, the environment, or religion, the situation is the same. Earthly explanations have been offered but these are of limited validity and must be continually revised. I am convinced that all these changes have a common origin that is spiritual. Everything is being forced to become new through an ongoing World Judgment. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is an increasing outpouring of spiritual power into our part of Creation. This increased power has the effect of quickening all happenings and forcing all cycles to a rapid close. This power stimulates everything into activity, including all that was previously in a state of slumber. Hence, we are witnessing unprecedented changes and acceleration of events on earth, both man-made and natural.

I remarked, in passing, that this increased pressure quickens the pace at which human spirits complete their cycles of reincarnation. But the Pressure of the Light also influences religious doctrines. False doctrines will be, and are being, exposed and various events "conspire" to enthrone correct teachings. Wrong structures of all descriptions, including those that promote blind faith and spiritual indolence, will also collapse. The victory of Truth approaches! In regard to the subject of this book, any interested observer would be struck by the increasing number of books, articles, and essays being published on life after death and on reincarnation. The subject is also receiving increased attention in academia as well as in the movie industry. More and more people are becoming convinced of the truth of reincarnation.

Geddes MacGregor, a professor of philosophy and religion in the United States, did an in-depth study of the history and theology of reincarnation in Christianity from its earliest beginning. In his published result (*Reincarnation in Christianity: A New Vision of the Role of Rebirth in Christian Thought*) he stated: "I cannot personally see any sound reason why reincarnationism (sic) should be accounted, either on historical or on theological grounds, irreconcilable with an orthodox Christian view of what God provides for the working out of the salvation that Christ, according to fundamental Christian belief, has made possible for those who can appropriate it…. Far from diminishing the force of anything in Christian experience, it may vivify (enliven, energize) Christian faith, enrich Christian hope, deepen Christian love, and abundantly clarify the human mind" (pages 130-131). As the

concluding paragraph of his book, Professor MacGregor wrote:

> "We may conclude that there is nothing in biblical thought or Christian tradition that necessarily excludes all forms of reincarnationism (sic). We have seen many historical reasons why it has been suppressed, both officially and at the popular level, in the history of the Christian Church. We have seen no reason why it must be in conflict with the historic teachings that have come to us through the Bible and the Church. We have seen, above all, that some form of reincarnationism (sic) could much enhance the spirituality of the West, not least at the present time when it stands so much in need of fresh avenues of development and new means of illumination" (p. 173).

The *Commonweal* magazine in its issue of August 9, 1991 (Volume 118, pages 455-457) carried a report of a symposium organized by a community of priests and brothers in the United States of America; the symposium had the title "Whither Christianity?" At the symposium, a professor of Scripture reminded participants that many persons thought that Jesus was a reincarnation of Elijah or Jeremiah. The apostles wondered if a man born blind was afflicted because of his sins in a former life; the question implied a belief in reincarnation. The well-known theologian, Hans Kung, believed that reincarnation was an open question, implying that Christians should resume a discussion of it.

A historian at that 1991 symposium on the theme of the future of Christianity noted that reincarnation was widely debated in the early centuries of the Christian Era. He remarked that no mainline Christian church had seriously considered the subject for 14 centuries, even though reincarnation is widely accepted by most Eastern religions. He attributed this fact to the Second Council of Constantinople, which was held in the year 553 AD. The historian said that at this Second Council (also known as the Fifth Ecumenical Council of the Church) "a splinter group of Eastern bishops without a pope was maneuvered by the Emperor Justinian, a frustrated theologian, to reject reincarnation as an authentic Christian belief."

The historian further reminded the symposium participants that Saint Gregory of Nyssa, a bishop and prominent theologian of the 4th Century, was an

eloquent advocate of reincarnation. Saint Gregory is quoted as having stated: "It is absolutely necessary that a person's soul must be purified and, if this does not take place during this life, it must be accomplished in future lives." Saint Augustine, who was certainly not a theological rebel, asked God: "Was I in another body?" Presumably prompted by some inner sensing, he wondered if he had existed before in another body. Many prominent Christian believers in reincarnation were cited in Chapter 4 of this book; in that Chapter, highly accomplished individuals and historical figures who believed in reincarnation were also mentioned.

Among the general public of Western societies, the number of people who now believe in reincarnation is substantial. For example some surveys report that about 22 percent of adults in the USA believe in some form of reincarnation. Gallop polls in the late 1980s indicated that 23 percent of American people, and 27 percent of their teenagers, believed that they had lived before and would live again in other incarnations. The theme has become prominent in several novels and movies. All these point to one fact — that the truth of life after death and of reincarnation can no longer be successfully suppressed. Under the pressure of the increased spiritual power on earth, spiritual truths will receive support from unexpected quarters and be helped to victory.

Let us hope that church officials will, as individuals, examine closely and objectively the case made for reincarnation in this book, and also encourage lay Christians to do the same. They should resist the very strong temptation to stick to dogmas and tradition.

Christianity in Change

In this connection, Rev. Don Cupitt, Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (UK) proposes that Christianity should now be practised without a dogma, but as a spiritual and ethical path, and a way of giving meaning to life. He notes that "religious change happens willy-nilly, even to those who deny and resist it; for even if the beliefs, the language, and the practices are most jealously conserved intact, their effective significance is altered by changes in the surrounding culture" (*The Sea of Faith*, London, BBC, 1984). He argues that conservative Christianity is a contradiction in terms. Don Cupitt asserts that we live in a time of religious upheaval; "people's deepest convictions,

their philosophy of life and their form of religious consciousness are all in turmoil."

Rev. Don Cupitt's views are shared by many. Many knowledgeable Christians are reexamining various aspects of Christianity, including even the books of the Bible. They are reconsidering the meaning and significance of the books of the Bible for our age in the light of recent findings by Bible scholars, archaeologists, and ancient historians. In one such effort, John Shelby Spong, the Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, in the United States of America, has argued that it makes no sense to interpret the Bible literally. He raises and answers many fundamental questions in his book *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (Harper San Francisco, 1991). On page 15 of the book, he writes:

> How can this book (the Bible) be used with integrity by men and women of faith? How can it be lifted out of the prejudices and cultural biases of bygone eras? How can it be a source of life to a twentieth- and soon-to-be-twenty-first century generation? If it continues to be viewed literally, the Bible, in my opinion, is doomed to be cast aside as both dated and irrelevant.

The changes taking place, the reexamination of doctrines and of beliefs, hold some dangers as well as great opportunities. The dangers have to do with the fact that some of the changes being advocated would tend to "de-spiritualize" Christianity. The changes would make it an essentially earthly affair, and thereby deprive it of a vision of the after-life. In my opinion, such changes would lead inexorably to atheism and materialism in all but name. On the other hand, the right understanding of reincarnation would truly spiritualize Christianity and lift individual Christians from the level of blind faith to that of genuine conviction of the Love and Justice of God.

Science and Religion

The move toward Christian atheism, toward purely earthly Christianity, is to a great extent an accommodation to the contemporary pre-eminence of science and technology. Many people reason that whatever cannot be proved by science does not deserve serious consideration. But they are wrong. The scientific approach has strict limits, limits recognized by the greatest

scientists. In this regard, let us quote the giant of science, Albert Einstein:

> Intelligence makes clear to us the interrelation of means and ends. But mere thinking cannot give us a sense of the ultimate and fundamental ends. To make clear these fundamental ends and valuations, and to set them fast in the emotional life of the individual, seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man. And if one asks whence derives the authority of such fundamental ends, since they cannot be stated and justified merely by reason, one can only answer: they come into being not through demonstration but through revelation, through the medium of powerful personalities. One must not attempt to justify them, but rather to sense their nature simply and clearly (Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, New York, Bonanza Books, pp. 42 - 43).

It is important that we understand clearly the correct relationship between science and religion. Obviously, we cannot do justice to this important subject here. But it should be stated that there is no inevitable contradiction between science and religion as long as religion subordinates itself to fundamental truths and science recognizes that its conventional methods cannot probe the non-material realms. Albert Einstein argued that even though the realms of science and religion are clearly marked off from each other, nevertheless there exist strong reciprocal relationships and dependencies between the two. He states: “Though religion may be that which determines the goal, it has nevertheless learned from science, in the broadest sense, what means will contribute to the attainment of the goals it has set up. But science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding.”

Einstein summarizes his view of the relationship between science and religion with this crisp statement: “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.” The boundaries of science, which is the product of the intellect, are the physical worlds. But spiritual truths that religions seek to fathom go way beyond the material realms. The Divine Laws, discussed in Chapter 9, are examples of such truths. They apply on earth as natural laws, which science can study and put to practical use. But the Divine Laws also

hold in appropriate forms in those parts of Creation that are inaccessible to science.

Many people take issue with the idea of revelation. This is because people have in the past been misled and deceived in the name of revelation and visions. It is true that a particular revelation or vision can be false or wrongly interpreted. Every revelation and vision must therefore be subjected to testing and close contemplation. In my view, we cannot go astray if we are guided by the fact that any true revelation would be consistent with the Perfection of God, His absolute Justice and His Love. Any teaching, "revelation" or "vision" must be recognized as false if it logically leads to the conclusion that God is imperfect, unjust, callous, or arbitrary. And any teaching, revelation or vision is undeserving of our attention if it logically leads to a contradiction of any of the Divine Laws which express the Will of God. It is in this connection that religions have historically faltered in that they tend to be willing to sacrifice the Perfection of God in defence of teachings, dogmas, and doctrines formulated by their authorities, often in some distant past.

Another danger to Christianity (and this is true of other religious organizations and movements) in a time of change is an easy accommodation to popular sentiments, to people's spiritual indolence, and their materialism. This accommodation leads to simplistic declarations about salvation that on deep reflection are not only meaningless but are detrimental to spiritual growth. The time has come for all of us as individuals to reexamine seriously the bases of all our beliefs.

New Opportunities

I have also noted that we live in a time of immense spiritual opportunities. These opportunities lie in the new spiritual knowledge available to humankind and which all genuine seekers will find. The great variety of experiences, sweet and sour, that come our way, whoever we may be, and wherever we may live, are also helps for our spiritual maturing. Christians, and others, should take advantage of these opportunities to make changes that lead in the right direction. We knew in part; we now have the possibility to acquire the full knowledge. And partial knowledge may now be discarded.

Changes of church doctrines require uncommon courage on the part of

church leadership. It is for this reason that one should applaud the action taken by the Catholic Church in April 2007 with respect to the teaching about Limbo. In the fifth century, St. Augustine concluded that infants who die without baptism were consigned to hell. This was because of the so-called original sin, which allegedly could only be removed through baptism. By the 13th century, theologians referred to the "limbo of infants" as a place where unbaptized babies were deprived of the vision of God, but did not suffer because they did not know what they were deprived of. Such unbaptized babies could not expect ever to enter Paradise to partake of the eternal happiness there but were condemned to remain in Limbo. This remained the official position of the Catholic Church for more than 700 years.

After several years of study of the matter, the Vatican's International Theological Commission produced its report entitled *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized*. The 41-page report whose publication was authorized by the Pope in April 2007 includes the following statement: "People find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if he excludes infants, who have no personal sins, from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian." The study concluded that "there are theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved and brought into eternal happiness even if there is not an explicit teaching on this question found in revelation." The idea of Limbo thus stands buried and erased from the teachings of the Catholic Church. I am struck by the fact that the International Theological Commission invoked, in part, the Justice and Mercy of God to come to its conclusion. I have argued in like manner in this book that Christians and non-Christians alike cannot speak with integrity of the Justice and Love of God without a belief in reincarnation.

In contemplating doctrinal changes, Christians should remember that they should be followers of Jesus Christ, not of any lesser authority. Thus, they should feel free to ask if a given doctrine or creed was actually taught by Christ Himself or was formulated by others. For example, consider the Apostles' Creed. How much of it represents the actual teaching of Jesus Christ, and how much were the formulations of others? The distinction is important and should be made. And this should lead us into a new Christianity. A new Christianity that does justice to the Perfection of God;

that strives to understand His immutable Divine Laws and that recognizes reincarnation as a necessary consequence of God's Justice and His Love. I conclude with the following quotation:

> How many seekers, and those who thought they knew all, unsuspectingly passed by the only real Master, the Son of God, at that time. Above all, those who considered themselves qualified to recognize His coming. Just those even became His bitterest enemies. Why do people not learn from this?
>
> Today we see Christians living in many wrong interpretations of their Master's teaching. Proud, arrogant, and yet devoid of understanding when faced with the deep Truth that lies in the Message of Christ.
>
> *This* alone makes it possible for the many sects and societies to flourish, because the human spirit feels a violent urge growing within it *for this*, namely that it needs *more* than the churches give it in their monotonous, superficial interpretations.
>
> People hope to receive greater clarity in these sects and societies, and are indeed often satisfied if it sounds *different* from the churches. The urge makes them already see progress in this, even if in reality it is much less than they have previously received in the churches (Abd-ru-shin, *Questions and Answers*, p. 71).

Chapter 14. Further Reading

I am addressing earnest seekers only. They must be able and willing to examine this matter objectively! Religious fanatics and irresponsible enthusiasts may hold aloof, for they are detrimental to the Truth. ("In the Light of Truth", The Grail Message, Volume I, "For Your Guidance").

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I have shown that a simple, clear, and logical explanation of reincarnation in all its ramifications depends on an understanding of the Laws of Creation (or Divine Laws), knowledge of the structure of Creation, of the nature of the human being, and of the purpose of human existence. In this connection, I must highlight the immeasurable value and unique significance of the three-volume book "*In the Light of Truth,"* The Grail Message from which I have quoted extensively. I have also quoted from three works related to the Grail Message: *Questions and Answers* (by the author of the Grail Message)*; A Gate Opens; and How is it that We Live after Death and What is the Meaning of Life.* These books are annotated hereunder.

"In the Light of Truth," The Grail Message by Abd-ru-shin. Vomperberg (Tyrol, Austria), Alexander Bernhardt Publishing Co., Volume I, 208 pages; Volume II, 412 pages; Volume III, 456 pages. Composite Edition (comprising all three volumes) 1,062 pages.

I consider this book a truly unique source of spiritual knowledge that is especially pertinent to our times. It is all-embracing and is intended for all who seriously seek to know the truths of life, regardless of religion, race, culture or socio-economic class. An introduction to the work with particular reference to its relationship with the teachings of Jesus Christ is provided in Chapter 1 of this book.

The Grail Message was originally written in the German language under the

title *"Im Lichte der Wahrheit: Gralsbotschaft."* Translations are available in English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Dutch, Czech, Italian, Russian, Romanian, and Persian. Translations into other languages are in preparation. While the translations are very helpful, they cannot substitute for the German original; those who are able to do so are urged to read the German edition.

All editions of the work as well as associated books are available from major bookshops around the world and from other book trade channels, such as Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.com, etc.

Questions and Answers by Abd-ru-shin. Vomperberg (Tyrol, Austria), Alexander Bernhardt Publishing Co., 1972. 232 pages

This book by the author of The Grail Message contains answers to 89 specific questions that he was asked during the period 1924-1937. They are the kinds of questions to which those interested in spiritual knowledge would seek answers. Knowledge that is pertinent to reincarnation is provided in several of the Answers. The book was originally written in German.

A Gate Opens by Herbert Vollmann. Stuttgart, Stiftung Gralsbotschaft Publishing Co.,1985. Composite Volume, 394 pages.

This volume is a composite edition of four books that were previously published separately. The four books which constitute Parts I, II, III, and IV of the Composite Volume have the following titles: *The World as it could be; Knowledge for the World of Tomorrow; What lies behind it...!;* and *A Gate Opens.* They are all translations from the German original versions.

The four Parts contain a total 83 essays on a wide range of subjects including not only spiritual topics but also the application of spiritual principles to some cultural, social, and economic questions. The book demonstrates how the knowledge contained in The Grail Message could be applied and it clarifies many hitherto unanswered questions. Of particular interest to Christians are the clear explanations of many Bible passages (including Revelation passages) and of the events of the End-Time in which we presently stand.

Many of the essays in the book deal directly or indirectly with reincarnation.

How is it that We live after Death and What is the Meaning of Life by Richard Steinpach. Stuttgart, Stiftung Gralsbotschaft Publishing Co., 1980. 63 pages.

This book is the text of a lecture by Dr. Richard Steinpach, an Austrian lawyer and natural philosopher. In clear, delightful language and with sophisticated logic and appropriate reference to modern science, the author shows how it is that we do indeed live after death, and that human beings necessarily reincarnate. It was originally written in German and has been translated into many languages.

Other Books

Many books, magazine and newspaper articles have been written on reincarnation and related subjects. Some are scholarly; others are merely sensational. They include fiction and nonfiction. But very few of these address reincarnation from a Christian perspective, and most of them are not comprehensive. Even fewer are the works that explain the process of reincarnation clearly and logically.

I list here, in alphabetical order by author, those that I found particularly useful in writing this book. I should stress, however, that I do not necessarily agree with all the views (or even most of the views) expressed in the books.

Anonymous. *Reincarnation and Christianity*. London, William Rider and Son Ltd, 1909. 96p. (The title page of the book, which I read at the British Museum Library, London, gives the author simply as "A Clergyman of the Church of England").

Cooper, Irving S. *Reincarnation: the hope of the world.* London, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1918. 109p.

Frieling,Rudolf. *Christianity and Reincarnation.* Edinburgh, Floris Books, 1977. 117p. (Originally published in German under the title "*Christentum und wiederverkorperung*." Stuttgart, Verlag Urachhaus, 1974).

Head, Joseph and S.L. Cranston *compilers and editors. Reincarnation; the Phoenix fire mystery: an East-West dialogue on death and rebirth from the worlds of religion, science, psychology, philosophy, art, and literature, and from great thinkers of the past and present.* New York, Julian Press/Crown Publishers, 1977. 620p.

Hodson, Geoffrey. *Reincarnation, Fact or Fallacy? An examination and exposition of the doctrine of rebirth.* Adyar, Madras (India), The Theosophical Publishing House, 1951. 89p.

MacGregor, Geddes. *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*. Totowa, N.J., Barnes and Noble Books, 1982. xi, 161p.

Prophet, Elizabeth Clare with Erin L. Prophet. *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity*. Corwin Springs, MT, Summit University Press, 1997. xviii, 412p.

Stevenson, Ian. The Explanatory Value of the Idea of Reincarnation. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease,* Volume 164, No. 5, pp. 305-325.

Stevenson, Ian. *Cases of the Reincarnation Type.* Charlottesville, The University Press of Virginia, 1977 - 1983. 4 vols.

Stevenson, Ian. *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 1: Birthmarks. Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies.* Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger, 1997, 2,268 pages. A smaller volume for the general reader, also published by Praeger, is entitled "*Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect.*"

Swarovski, Daniel. *The Time is Ripe: Reflections, Essays and Lectures*. Innsbruck, Austria, Sieben Quellen Verlag, 1981. 229p.